

THE STARVING MILLIONS

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**TO
THE HONOURED MEMORY OF THE FAMINE-SLAIN
IN BENGAL, 1943**

**TO YOU, MANICK, KALU, HASSAN, MANADA
and
TO MORE THAN THREE and A HALF MILLION SOULS,*
WHO PERISHED FROM FAMINE**

**I
Pay My Sincere Homage**

FOR
Your patience, your long suffering, your resignation, your
general acquiescence in a condition of affairs which afflicted
you so sorely, and above all for the entire absence
on your part from holding anybody, except
God indeed, responsible for your sufferings

**YOU
MUST HAVE CALLED ON KRISHNA, SHIVA, THE GOD
OF GODS, ALLAH—TO SEE YOU DIE !**

BUT
You were not aware of those mischief-makers,
who had been in the back-ground of this
MAN-MADE FAMINE

**HOARDERS, PROFITEERS, ADMINISTRATORS, POLITICIANS, MILITARY
STRATEGISTS, SCIENTISTS, and last of all,
the SYSTEM of RULE that originates in Great Britain.**

TO
My Country-men and Country-women, I say :
**AWAKE, ARISE, Remain not for ever fallen, REALIZE FACTS,
HUNGER and THIRST, NACKEDNESS and POVERTY
will speedily come to an end.**

**FIND OUT
WHO AND WHAT HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE
FOR DEATHS FROM STARVATION.**

Tuesday, February 22, 1944.

*With apology to the Late SIR WILLIAM DIGBY for his memorable
FAMINE EPITAPH*

* According to the estimates given by the Anthropology
Department of the University of Calcutta.

H U N G E R - M A R C H E R S

I

This blue sky is still and dead ;
Nowhere
A sign of war,
No clamour or struggle ahead.
Here, the sky has a dreadful hue,
And under it a sorrowful view—
—A crowd of homeless hunger-
marchers.

III

No trace of war
Is there ;
No wail in the air about
Of the stricken and the dying rout.
All in dire distress
With no food nor dress.
Here, the sky is pale blue,
Underneath, the only view—
—A crowd of homeless hunger-
marchers.

II

Here's no patch of cloud blazing
All alone
Far away from horizon ;
No blossom of fire, glowing.
Here the sky is dry blue,
Underneath a lonely view—
—A crowd of homeless hunger-
marchers.

IV

Nowhere under the vast sky
Shadows of numerous skeletons lie
See, oh blind,
Nowhere shall you find
The wandering monster of war
Spreading distress afar ?
Here, the sky is silent blue,
Under it a mournful view—
—A crowd of homeless hunger-
marchers

V

Is there no war ?
Anywhere ?
Why, then, such woeful cries
Incessantly rise ?
Why the sky a dead mass of blue,
And underneath, the only view ?—
—A crowd of homeless hunger-
marchers.

(After the Bengali poem written by Mr. Dinesh Das)



THEN AND NOW

"THIS Bengal Famine is something more than an isolated incident. It is a danger signal, warning us of long-range measures which are needed as well as immediate relief," said Mr. Leopold S. Amery, the Secretary of State for India, at the debate on the last Bengal famine held in the House of Commons on November 4, 1943.

"The vast majority of the population of India have always been and still are *subsistence cultivators*," he continued. "They wring a meagre and precarious existence from their small holdings."

"In former times famine in India, as in China, was endemic whenever *failure of monsoon* rains or floods or cyclones led to a local or general *crop shortage*.

"UNDER BRITISH RULE, construction of over 40,000 miles of railway and vast irrigation projects, and not the least, the ever present availability in peace-time of shipping have enabled *supplies* to be rushed to *deficit areas*. With the help of a highly developed organization for famine relief, the Indian authorities have in recent times been able to keep in check the ever-present menace of a local famine. But, there is the gravest long-range problem which India has to face.

"In India the gravest problem in future will be to find ways by improved agricultural methods, by industrialization and by education to somehow or other outstrip the *pressure of the population* which leaves so little a margin of surplus, whether for individual standard of life or for financing social reform."

Up to this Mr. Amery revealed the general truth at the back of the miserable situation. He, then, viewed the thing in the light of the present day, and attempted to brush off the charge of a wilful negligence and inattention which any one might place on the India Office.

THE CAUSE OF INDIAN FAMINES

FAILURE OF PERIODIC RAINS ?

Three things should be remembered. *First*, there is never failure of water everywhere. When drought is severest in certain sections, other sections have plenty. *Secondly*, there is much irrigation, and there might easily be more. Wherever irrigation exists, failure of rain does not necessarily mean failure of crops. *Thirdly*, if transporation is easy, food can be conveyed from areas of abundance to areas of scarcity.

OVER-POPULATION ?

Population of India is not so dense as in some of the European States which are prosperous, and where famines are never dreamt of. Nor is the birth-rate high in India ; it is less than in England, and much less than in Germany and several other continental countries. India is never over-populated.

WHAT'S THE CAUSE ?

Extreme, abject, and awful poverty of the people is the real cause of India's famines. What has produced this terrible poverty ?—heavy and constant drain of wealth from India to England.

It has often been pointed out that the British Government in India is the most expensive Government in the world. The reason is, it is a Government of foreigners. The poor Indian *rayats* must sweat and bleed and go hungry and, if need be, starve, that an ever-growing number of Englishmen may have big salaries, and big pensions.

—J. T. SUNDERLAND,
New England Magazine,
September, 1900.

The figures in the White Paper had not shown deficit of food crops for the two years preceeding the famine, the India Office could not have been aware of a distress which followed in Bengal. Then the Central Government in India did take all measures, thought to be quite sufficient to meet the needs of the situation. It was Mr. Fazlul Huq's (the then Chief Minister of Bengal) optimism that led Bengal to distress, starvation and deaths.*

Moreover, the impact of war on "so precariously balanced an economic structure" of India, Mr. Amery admitted, was a force, great enough to throw India's economy out of balance.

Possibly, this war disturbed much the running order of the country's economic life. It drew upon India's food production some, if not considerable, for export to Ceylon and the Persian Gulf countries ; it led to the loss of Burma rice ; it caused the use, if not misuse, of foodstuffs for consumption, reserve and waste by the military personnel ; it, for the worst, brought upon the country a "money famine"—created by inflation of currency and wide divergence in the average standard of life ; it called in a host of hoarders, profiteers and racketeers in the market of food.

* "At the last December's (1942) Food Conference Mr. Fazlul Huq was not prepared to join in any collective scheme, and only wished Bengal to be allowed to manage its own affairs. If it could not help others, it could at any rate manage to subsist on its own rice crop. Unfortunately, Mr. Fazlul Huq's optimism about the actual Bengal situation proved unfounded."

—Mr. AMERY's speech in the House of Commons.

Speaking on the same famine situation Mr. L. S. Amery observed on an earlier occasion :

"UNDER BRITISH RULE an intensive system of public relief works and a large body of highly efficient officers had in the past done wonders in keeping famine at bay. But now even with every effort to develop industry to exploit irrigations and to improve agricultural methods, the menace of famine has never been wholly removed. To it have been added two new factors, the war and the breaking of the former unity of the Indian administration by the extension of self-government. Larger salaries of war work and lack of consumers' goods have raised prices throughout. The rise in food prices is further accentuated by the loss of rice imports from Burma, by a bad rice harvest and disastrous floods and cyclones in Bengal and Sind. The key to the whole situation lies in *better distribution of foodstuffs*. But the Government of India discovers great difficulties in many directions in securing co-operation from provinces to the full extent required to bring about really even distribution." (Birmingham Speech, October 15, 1943).

Though the present Secretary of State in his memorable speeches referred to some special causes resulting in the last Bengal famine, whose shadow has not yet receded away, he could not efface from the pages of history and other records the long tale of mismanagement committed through negligence, apathy and bad statesmanship. Except for mal-administration in the autonomous province of Bengal—whose limit of self-rule was, however, ascertained by the late Governor, Sir John Herbert, with the exercise of his right of dissolving the then coalition Ministry,—or for the immediate effects of the war, which also stood on the

way of proper food shipments from abroad to India, Mr. Amery was probably sorry to have been forced to repeat, both in sense and in language, what his old, old predecessor, Lord George Hamilton, had delivered on November 17, 1896, at Turnham Green,—an address upon Indian Famine.

He had said :

"Our cynical friends abroad are apt to assert that the only interest which we make in the maintenance and expansion of our external Empire arises from more selfishness and a desire to get the utmost we can out of the territories thus annexed, and not to devote to them in return as little as we can.

"India is a continent which from time immemorial has been specially subject to scarcity and famine yet under no dynasty or rule have such persistent and systematic efforts been made to ward off famine and its consequences from the population of the country as have been so successfully established UNDER BRITISH RULE.

SPELL OF MAHADEO

Siva or *Mahadeo*, the destroying god, and his consort have their most ardent worshippers among the Hindu peasants. The invocation that goes up to heaven from the mouth of every devout Hindu peasant in the valley of the Ganges during the sowing of the *Rabi* is *Hariyar, Mahadeo Hariyar*, which means, clothe the fields with green, *Mahadeo*, clothe the fields with green.

Recent events have looked as if the chiefs of the India Office and the Government of India were under the spell of *Mahadeo* in one of his evil moods as the mischief which these chiefs have already worked is incalculable.

—Donald N. Reid,

INDIA, *March, 1897.*

"Of the vast population of India, (then numbering nearly 300,000,000) 80 per cent belong to the *agricultural classes*. The density of the agricultural population varies according to the regularity and amount of rain in each district. Where the rain is heavy and regular the population is exceedingly thick ; where irregular and scarce it is correspondingly sparse ; and therefore, in the past, when an occasional famine occurred with a dense population, *insufficiency of food* has been the great difficulty with which to contend ; but in the more sparsely inhabited districts the difficulty was one of *distribution of food*.

"Since the Government of India has been transferred to the Crown we have had to contend with several famines. In 1866 a famine occurred in Orissa, then a dependency of Bengal. The country was equally inaccessible by sea or by land, and a terrible mortality ensued. Six years later there was a great famine in Bengal. Lord Salisbury was the Secretary of State for India, and I, as Under-Secretary, was his mouthpiece in the House of Commons. The Government of India were determined that life at any cost should be saved, and they succeeded ; but there was a great waste of money. In the next few years there was a continual series of scarcities culminating in the great Famine of 1876-78. Notwithstanding all the efforts of Government and a vast expenditure, a great mortality occurred in connection with this visitation.

"The Indian Government decided in each year to appropriate a certain proportion of the revenue of the country to a Famine Fund, to be devoted either to famine prospective works, to the relief of famine, or to the reduction of debt ; and they further decided that in every one of the provinces of India there should be drawn up a Famine Administration

Code, which was periodically to be revised and improved as experience matured. There is no permanent Poor Law system in India such as exists in this country (England), and the officials controlling the higher branches of administration in India are few and far between compared to the enormous number that they control."

Lord George Hamilton had been, however, sympathetic towards India's distress and had admitted that the Government in India lacked certain humanitarian sense, and the administration could not be as efficient as it should have been. But Mr. Amery laid the blame at other's doors.

War or no war, famine and pestilence are never new to India. Mr. William Digby, C.I.E., while making a comprehensive study of the famines in India in his immortal book, *Prosperous British India : A Revelation*, gives a catalogue of famines before and under British rule till 1901.

The history of famines prior to, and during the early British rule is not exact nor abundant. It may, however, be said that all the famines were local, and not one approached in extent or intensity the three great "distresses of the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century.

BEFORE BRITISH RULE

In 11th century	2	famines Both local	
„ 13th „	1	„ Around Delhi	
„ 14th „	3	„ All local	
„ 15th „	2	„ Both local	
„ 16th „	3	„ All local	
„ 17th „	3	„ General area	
„ 18th „	4	„ North-Western Pro-	
		vinces, Delhi, Sind	
		(twice) ; all local.	

*UNDER BRITISH RULE**Last 30 Years of the 18th Century*

1769-70	Due to drought followed by floods ; mortality very great	Bengal, in certain districts
1783	No record	Madras and Bombay
1784	—	Upper India
1792	—	Madras, Hyderabad, Southern Bombay, Deccan, Gujrat, Marwar

First Half of the 19th Century

1802-3	Due to war : many deaths	Bombay
1803-4	No great mortality	North-Western Provinces and Rajputana

RAILWAYS AND FAMINES

Pre-Railway Era
From 1802 to 1854 there were 13 famines ; probable loss of life 5,000,000

Post-Railway Era
From 1860 to 1879 there were 16 famines ; loss of life 12,000,000

In the former period many parts of the country were in a state of anarchy and frequent wars, which Anglo-Indian historians never tire of using as a foil to the Roman peace we have established : indeed, two of the famines were directly traceable to war. In the face of those official figures it is clear that, whatever railways may have done, they have not prevented famine. They have, however, done marvels in relieving distress. But for them, the five millions who perished in 1878-79 would have been ten or might have been fifteen millions. So how terrible is the condition of the people who with steamships and railways, with Burma and Bengal to indent upon for foodstuffs, nevertheless died by millions ! —INDIA, *January 16, 1891*

1805-7	Many deaths	Madras
1811-14	No serious distress	Madras
	Severe	Bombay
1812-13	Mortality 2 millions	Rajputana
1823	Many deaths	Madras
1824-25	Scarcity	Bombay, North- Western Provinces
1833-35	Mortality very great	Northern Madras
	Scarcity	Bombay
1837-38	Mortality 1 million	Upper India

Second Half of the 19th Century

1854	—	Madras
1860-61	Mortality 500,000	North-Western Pro- vinces and Punjab
1865-66	" 130,000	Orissa (in 6 districts)
	" 135,000	Bihar and Northern Bengal
	" 450,000	Madras
1868-69	" 1,250,000	Rajputana
	" 600,000	North-Western Pro- vinces
	" 600,000	Punjab
	" 250,000	Central Provinces
	No record	Bombay
1873-74	—	Bengal, Bihar, North-Western Pro- vinces and Oudh
1876-77	Mortality 900,000	Bombay
	" 70,000	Hyderabad (Deccan)

1576-78	Mortality 8,250,000	Madras, North-Western Provinces and Oudh ; noteworthy for the imposition of the 1 lb. ration
	„ 1,100,000	Mysore, then under British administration
1880	Mortality not stated ; no relief measure taken	Deccan, Southern Bombay, Central Provinces, Nizam's Dominions and North-Western Provinces
1884	Mortality included in the above figure	Bengal, Bihar, Chhota Nagpur and some districts of Madras
1886-87	—	Central Provinces

A CRUEL POSITION

Undoubtedly, the English public will cordially sympathize with their stricken fellow-subjects in India, and liberally aid them in their extremity. The cruel position is that while they can in a vague way comprehend a famine and respond with alacrity to a special call in the name of humanity, they do not comprehend, and have no effective means of continuously following the ordinary administration on which depends the safety and the health of India, and withal the supremacy and imperial greatness of England.

Prof. A. F. MURISON, 1897.

Mr. Carlyle, the most eminent man of letters in England, has taught the gospel of silence in thirty octavo volumes. The Government of India believes most thoroughly in Carlyle's doctrine that silence is golden ; hence the reason why so little is known in England about India.

DONALD N. REID.

1888-90	Total mortality		
	1,500,000	Bihar, States in Orissa,	
		Ganjam, Madras,	
		Kumaon and Garwal	
1891-92	Failure of North-East monsoon :	Madras, Bombay,	
	Mortality 1,620,000	Deccan, Bengal,	
		Ajmere-Merwara,	
		Garwal and Almora	
1895-97	Mortality 5,650,000	Bundelkhand, North-	
	a great famine	Western Provinces,	
		Oudh, Bengal and	
		Central Provinces	
1899-1900	A most terrible	The entire tract of	
	famine known in	land from the borders	
	Indian history :	of Kashmir to Mysore,	
	Mortality 2,500,000	some spots of Madras,	
		Sind and Orissa	
1901	Mortality 750,000	Gujrat, Deccan, Bom-	
		bay, Karnatak, Madras	
		and Southern * Punjab	

TOTAL MORTALITY (admitted) in forty-seven years
since 1854 to 1901. 28,825,000

The Nineteenth Century, for comparison purposes, may be divided into four equal periods, and the immense increase in the number and intensity of famine during the last quarter, as compared with the years 1800 to 1825, may well be noted.

1800-1825—Five famines, with slight loss of life ;
some of these famines arose from wars,
and none extended over a large area.

STARVING MILLIONS

1826-1850—Two famines; mainly local. (By this time practically all of India was under British rule.)

1851-1875—Six famines, worst in Orissa; mortality being 5 millions.

1876-1900—Eighteen famines; 19 million lives lost.

LIMIT OF STATESMANSHIP

What is the Government doing to provide against the famine, looming like a shroud over the people, instead of arranging for importing food on an adequate scale? The limit of its statesmanship is reached when it has ordered a ship-load of horse carrot seed for starving people. Lord Elgin blandly assures the Home authorities that there is no need whatever for help in the shape of public subscriptions, as the Government of India is quite able to cope with the trifling distress that exists. Was ever such a fatuous counsel heard from the lips of a responsible ruler! By and by money will be of no use when the food stocks of the country are exhausted. The money will merely mock at people's sufferings. The Government will then begin to think of importing grain, but they may save themselves the trouble during the months that must elapse before it can be brought to people's doors. The Central and the North-East provinces will be converted into a huge grave-yard.

—THE STATESMAN, 1897.

FACTS ABOUT FAMINES

HISTORICAL facts that are to be noted in connection with famines, writes Sir H. Bartle E. Frere, Member of the Indian Council, and President of the Royal Geographical Society, are as follows : *first*, years of famine or of scarcity rarely come singly ; they generally occur in cycles now, as they did of old. The causes and laws of the periodical recurrence of seasons, when the usual rains being deficient or irregular scarcity and famine ensue, are matters to be duly investigated. *Secondly*, famines are not of rare occurrence in Asia. *Thirdly*, famines are less frequent in Bengal than in other parts of India, but when they do occur they are far more severe. *Fourthly*, mortality from starvation continues long after actual want of food has been supplied.

Why famines are less frequent in Bengal ?—Permanent Settlement in Bengal kept famine at bay for many years, as Sir Frere opines. Again, *why famines are severe in Bengal ?*—Facilities for meeting the calamity are far greater everywhere out of Bengal than in the province itself. Nowhere in India except in Bengal the District Officers know so little of their districts. Then, there is the caste that will stand in the way of eating imported and novel foods. Cultivation of articles such as opium, cotton, sugar, silk, and above all, jute is said to be the cause of a diminished production of grain in Bengal and of a consequent want of food. "I don't think", says Sir Bartle Frere, "this reason will stand examination. It is quite clear that if we let the farmers grow what they find pays them best, it is the fault of the Government in not giving roads and means of communication to enable the farmers to buy a sufficiency of grain from other quarters."

**WHY IS
FAMINE MORE DESTRUCTIVE NOW
THAN IN ANCIENT DAYS?**

Aforetime, as a rule famine was experienced after two years of drought or three years of deficient rainfall not amounting to drought.

Now, one year's failure of rain at the right time for agricultural operations, even though plenty of rain falls during the year for one harvest, produces acute famine.

Then, the grain stores which every village possessed greatly mitigated suffering. As all India has never, during recorded history, suffered from drought at one and the same time, the pangs of hunger arising from this cause, and not to be satisfied, were felt in only particular regions—isolated (for want of communications) from other parts of India where there was plenty and where the people ate fully from their abundance.

Now, railways having found their way into every part of the country, each year the surplus is exported which, in other days, were stored; when the faulty rainfall gives them trouble the empty districts are supplied from whatever district has grown a decent crop, with the result that all over India prices rise and rise and never again fall to the old level. Consequently, everywhere food is dear, and two hundred millions feel the pinch where, even under the pre-British conditions, a few millions only would have suffered.

**WHY IS
INDIA MORE LIABLE TO FAMINE
THAN OTHER COUNTRIES?**

Not because rains fail and moisture is denied. Always even in the worst of years, there is water enough poured from the skies on Indian soil to germinate and ripen the grain.

But because India is steadily and rapidly growing poorer.

With the best of intentions in the world, or at least what we have deluded ourselves into believing were the best of intentions, we have *done* that which we *ought not* to have done and have left *undone* that which we *ought* to have done, consequently there is little 'health' in all that vast country.

When Lord Curzon, in 1900, carried a begging bowl among the nations beseeching subscriptions for the famine-stricken, the question was asked, '*why should America give?*' It was urged that India's millions were starving because of *England's neglect* of duty to India.

"*It is too late* to bring India back to prosperity? More often than not, in pondering over the situation, I think *it is too late.*"

—WILLIAM DIGBY,
Prosperous British India: A Revelation.

How to mitigate the evils of famine?—War must be declared on famine. In this war it is all important to know as early as possible what will require to be done. There is the absence of an administrative machinery which can furnish accurate statistics of the probable wants of any district.

Local prohibition of export or local discouragement, where there is no power of prohibition, is a favourite native method of meeting scarcity. It is selfish and short-sighted, and like everything selfish and short-sighted, it is a bad policy, says Sir Bartle Frere.

When a famine in Rajputana, in 1870, carried off hundreds of thousands, most of the little Rajputana States, instead of making roads and encouraging imports, prohibited the export of grain from their own dominions; and those, who did so, lost by thousands not only their own but their neighbours' subjects, who might have been their customers, and thus have saved their lives. During the whole of the Persian Famine in 1873, one of the worst that had been known in Asia, the exportation of grain was strictly prohibited: and though such prohibitions were very ineffectual, they were sufficiently potent to entirely derange trade, and to prevent import, when import was possible.

If Bengal would have been entirely fed by grain grown in Bengal, something might have been said in favour of a prohibition of export. But we all know that sufficient grain does not exist, and that if export be interfered with except in the way of raising price by purchase, import will necessarily be discouraged. "If the famine should assume the proportions we apprehend," Sir Bartle Frere wrote in 1873, "the whole amount of food which Bengal will require to draw from other sources than from its own soil will be so large,

that the whole of the exportable quantity furnished by even an average year would be but a drop in the ocean. Every pound of grain lying for export and bought up by the Government must encourage imports, but every such pound arbitrarily prevented by order of the Government from being exported must tend to discourage imports."

"To meet even a moderate scarcity and a very partial famine," Sir Bartle Frere continues, "it will be above all things necessary to keep up and strengthen such administrative organization as already exists, and to prevent the people crowding in a helpless herd to die of disease, or starve at places remote from their own homes."

What can be done to prevent future famines?—The permanent administrative machinery must be organized and be well linked together from the Viceroy down to the villagers, Sir Frere suggests.

Next, the country must be provided with ample means of communications. The greatest safeguard of all against famine is the creation of great works of irrigation and internal navigation.

To the same question, Sir William Wedderburn, Bar-at-Law, M: P., puts forward certain propositions as follows :

Sir Bartle Frere's study on Indian famines was published in December, 1873. Of the results of his study the main ones have already been collected. And the following seems to be of some worth being taken into account.

"Northern India has suffered more intensively and extensively from visitations of famines than the Deccan. The reason for this is not far away to seek. The Northern India is far more deserty than the Deccan. Many more of the revolts, invasions, battles for power have been fought in Northern India than in the Deccan."

(I)—excessive mortality in an Indian famine is due to the extreme poverty of the rural population, who do not possess a store of food, money or credit sufficient to tide over one failure of harvest. (II)—this mortality could be prevented if the population had such a store of food, money or credit; (III)—with reasonable reforms in the administration, the *rayat* would not only be in a position to possess such a store, but he might even become moderately prosperous; (IV)—the India Office, will neither initiate these necessary reforms itself, nor will it allow others to carry them out.

India is suffering from chronic destitution of the masses—their precarious existence on the verge of starvation. Failure of a harvest is only a push which sends them down into the abyss. It is clear that the people would not die if they had food in their house, or if they had cash to buy it, or if they had credit to borrow it.

India possesses almost boundless agricultural wealth. In her vast domain she has climates suited to every known product. She has a fertile soil, an unfailing sun, abundant labour,—skilful and cheap. All that is wanted is working capital. But, unfortunately, the *rayat*, as a class, has no capital. By a hard and rigid system of land taxation he is drained of his capital, and made a bond slave of the village money-lender.

The reorganized method of supplying working capital to peasant proprietors by the establishment of agricultural banks was devised at Poona in 1882. In Germany alone at that time there were some 2,000 such banks, doing a business amounting to something like 150 million sterling, with immense benefit to the rural population. Every

other country in Europe followed the example of Germany. On May 31, 1884, a unanimous despatch, signed by the Viceroy and his colleagues, was forwarded to England setting forth fully the case, and asking the sanction of the Secretary of State to the proposed experiment. "But as it entered the portals of the India Office, the scheme was stabbed in the dark", writes Sir Wedderburn.

A period of transition from Mogul sovereignty to British supremacy, the Eighteenth Century was an anarchical period. As the Mogul empire declined, the Sikhs and the Marhattas burst forth and shook the imperial throne at Delhi. In the meantime, the Dutch, the French and the English vied for supremacy in India. The Dutch, who had been in this country since long, were thrown out of business which they had established here. The French, too, being far inferior to the English in constitution of their companies, enterprise and wealth gradually fell back.

Among the natives "the princes and other public men of India had sunk to an extremely low level. Nearly

A SINGULAR PHENOMENON

The immense export of wheat which is going on from Calcutta, Bombay and Karachi, in the teeth of the painfully high prices prevailing over nearly the whole of India, and of threatened famine in parts of Madras, is surely a singular phenomenon. However much we English may be blinded to it by a stereotyped belief in economical dogmas, and by the convenience to industrial England of cheap grain, we can hardly expect the untutored Indian to watch with equanimity the price of the food which even in normal times absorbs some four-fifths of his scanty income, going steadily up almost to famine rates, while every railway station is blocked with huge quantities of grain for export across the sea.—INDIA, August 28, 1891.

all the noble men of that age lived vicious lives, stained by gross sensuality, ruthless cruelty and insatiable greed."

In June, 1757, Nawab Sirajdaula fell a victim to the conspiracy of Mir Jafar, the Chief in Command of his army. Mir Jafar "received the reward for his treason, and was formally installed as Nawab by Clive, who exercised the real power." After three years of this double-handed rule in Bengal, in February, 1760, Clive left for England. At the same time the son of the then Mogul Emperor and the Marhattas invaded Bengal and reduced it "to a state of intense distress." The new Governor found the treasury of Calcutta empty, and the allowance to the troops was in arrear for several months. Mir Jafar had to retire. "The English promised military aid to their nominee, Mir Kashim, the son-in-law of Mir Jafar, recouping themselves by securing the cession of the districts of Burdwan, Midnapore and Chittagong for payment to the troops—the first instance of the system of subsidiary alliance." By 1765 Clive returned to Bengal and began his work on reforming and remedying "the evils of the state." The *diwani* of the whole of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was granted by Emperor Shah Alam to the East India Company. For about two years Clive remained in this country and towards the beginning of 1767 he sailed to England for good. The charge of the territories was left to Mr. Harry Verelst, who again handed on his duties to Mr. John Carter in 1769. "The administration of Mr. Carter, otherwise of little interest, was signalized by the famine of 1770, a disaster which, as Hunter truly observes, is the key to the history of Bengal for the succeeding forty years."

The famine was due to the early cessation of the rains in 1769, which caused minor autumn crop of rice to wither

and which also prevented growth of the main crop due for harvesting in December. Lack of communications and other unfavourable circumstances sufficed to produce a famine of unsurpassed intensity from that one failure of rain. Dacca, south-eastern Bengal and Bihar,—both north and south of the Ganges, were rendered desolate—a silent and deserted province. It is, however, difficult to believe that it was solely for the single failure of rain that such a terrible disaster happened in Bengal—even if difficulties there had been in executing transport of food from surplus to deficit areas.

In his review of the State of Bengal, Warren Hastings, the then Governor-General of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, writes; "The effects of the dreadful famine, which visited the provinces in the year 1770, and raged during the whole course of the year, have been regularly made known to you (this was the Annual Report of the East Indian Company to the Directors in England) by our former advices, and to the public by laboured descriptions, in which every circumstance of fact and every art of languages have been accumulated to raise compassion, and to excite indignation against your servants, whose unhappy lot it was to be the

MILTON SPEAKS

The hungry sheep look up and are not fed,
But swoll'n with wind and the rank mist they draw
Rot inwardly and foul contagion spread :
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours space, and nothing said :
—But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to strike once, and strike no more,

These lines were meant for the nurture of souls but they apply equally to nutrition for body.

witness and spectators of the sufferings of their fellow-creatures. But its influence on the revenue has been yet unnoticed, and even unfelt, but by those from whom it was collected ; for, notwithstanding the loss of at least one-third of the inhabitants of the Province, and the consequent decrease of the cultivation, the nett collections of the 1771 exceeded even those of 1768, as will appear from the abstract of accounts. It was naturally to be expected that the diminution of the revenue should have kept an equal pace with the other consequences of so great a calamity. That it did not was owing to its being violently kept up to its former standard. To ascertain all the means by which this was effected will not be easy." It can be imagined with what amount of harshness the tax-gatherers of the East India Company collected land revenue.

Most cleverly indeed the I. C. S. historian, Vincent A. Smith has attempted to conceal facts in a peculiar way : "The puny efforts of private charity, which seems to have been generous, could 'do little to alleviate the overwhelming distress. At Murshidabad the Resident reported that the living were feeding on the dead and that the streets were choked with corpses. The obligations to relieve famine at any cost and to strain every nerve of the administration in order to save life, which was never acknowledged by any native government, Hindu or Muhammedan, was very imperfectly recognized even by the Anglo-Indian government before 1873. In 1770 such notions concerning duty of a ruling power had not occurred to anybody, Indian or European, and if they occurred the means for putting them in practice did not exist. *The East India Company's officers cannot be blamed for the failure to deal with the famine on modern lines. They did*

not then administer the country, of which the revenue affairs were solely in charge of *Muhammad Raza Khan*, who did not worry about the sufferings of the people. He collected the revenue almost in full and added 10 per cent for 1771."

In 1770, thirteen years after the battle of Plassey and introduction of the British rule in Bengal, the fertile province was devastated by an appalling famine, the effects of which the Hon'ble John Shore, afterwards Lord Teignmouth, has left us in a most affecting description. A few years later Lord Cornwallis came to India as Governor-General, and suggested permanent fixity in the land tax, as the measure best calculated to restore prosperity among a people who subsisted chiefly by agriculture. His despatch dated February 3, 1790, states :

"There is this advantage to be expected from a fixed assessment in a country subject to draught and inundation that it affords a strong inducement to the landholder to exert himself to repair as speedily as possible the damages which his land may have sustained from those calamities."

In September, 1783, the same Governor-General wrote to the authorities at home :

"I may safely assert that a third of the Company's territory in Hindusthan is now a jungle inhabited by wild beasts. Will a ten-year lease induce any proprietor to clear away that jungle and encourage *rayats* to cultivate the lands ?"

Accordingly, throughout the extensive province, where the land tax was permanently fixed in 1793, the horrors of famine were unknown for more than half a century. Official records give evidence to the growing prosperity of the people under the Permanent Settlement Regulations, and

likewise show that calamities befel other Indian provinces, where arbitrary assessments prevailed.

The Report of the Commissioner of Burdwan, Official Gazette of India, October 20, 1883, stated : "The Bengal of to-day offers a startling contrast to Bengal of 1793. The wealth and prosperity of the country have marvellously increased."

This extract testifies to the benefits which continued to flow from the Permanent Settlement, until that source of agricultural prosperity and popular contentment was checked by the Bengal Tanancy Act, passed in 1885, which authorised the Executive to disregard the pledges of 1793 and to appropriate the wealth which a fair observance of these pledges had enabled the land owners and cultivators of Bengal to accumulate.

Again, the Blue Book on the Deccan Riots Commission of 1788 noted : "The over-estimate of the capabilities of the Deccan, acted upon by our early collectors, drained the country of its agricultural capital, and accounts for the poverty and distress in which the cultivating population has ever since been plunged."

The distinguished historian and moralist, Pineau Duclos, said, *La nature donne les vivres ; les hommes font la famine* .—Nature provides food, famine is wrought by men, a saying which seems specially apt to India, where the soil and climate supply ample food for her millions, and produce even a surplus for export ; yet gaunt famine periodically stalks that land of plenty, inflicting pangs of hunger and horrors of a slow death by starvation on thousands, nay, millions, of her children. Ever since British rule was introduced into Bengal in 1757, and at earlier periods

IMPERISHABLE EMPIRE

"The destinies of our Indian Empire are covered with thick darkness. It is difficult to form any conjecture as to the fate reserved for a state which resembles no other in history, and which forms by itself a separate class of political phenomena. The laws which regulate its growth and its decay are still unknown to us. It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system ; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government ; that having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not ; but never will I attempt to avert or to retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history. To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens would indeed be a title to glory all our own. The septre may pass away from us. Unforseen accidents may derange our most profound schemes of policy. Victory may be inconstant to our arms. But there are triumphs which are followed by no reverses. There is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism ; that empire is the imperishable empire of our hearts and our morals, our literature and our law."

LORD MACAULAY

Speech of July 10, 1833.

in Madras and Bombay, efforts have been made professedly to avert visitations by famine, but to what ends ?

According to the ancient Hindu custom, the claim of Government on account of land revenue is for a certain share of the gross produce of every field. Upon this point the ordinance of MANU is as follows : "The land revenue consists of a share of grain and other agricultural produce. Of grain the share is $\frac{1}{12}$ th, $\frac{1}{8}$ th, or $\frac{1}{6}$ th, according to soil and labour necessary to cultivate. This may also be raised in cases of emergency as far as $\frac{1}{4}$ th."

KING'S DUTY IN FAMINE

During famine, the King shall show favour to his people by providing them with seeds and provision.

He may either do such works as are usually resorted to in calamities ; he may show favour by distributing either his own collection of provisions or the hoarded income of the rich among the people ; or seek for help from his friends among kings ; or the policy of thinning the rich by exacting excessive revenue (*Karsanam*) ; or causing them to vomit their accumulated wealth (*Vamanam*) may be resorted to.

—ARTHASASTRA

When the Jain saint, Bhadrabahu, predicted a famine in Northern India which would last for 12 years and the prophecy began to be fulfilled in 298 B.C. the saint led 12,000 Jains to the South in search of more favoured lands. The Mauryan King, Chandragupta, abdicated and accompanied the emigrants, who made their way to Sravana Belgola (the White Jain Tank) in Mysore, where Bhadrabahu soon died. Emperor Chandragupta, having survived the saint for 12 years more, starved himself to death. According to another story Chandragupta is said to have accompanied Chanakya, or Kautilya, the author of *Arthashastra* or the theory of politics—substantially identical with the ideas and ideals of Machiavelli's *Prince*.

Under this system no harassing and untimely demand for cash ever came upon the *rayat*, because the claim of Government did not arise until the crop was reaped. Now the great mistake committed by the British consists in breaking up this ancient customary arrangement instead of developing and perfecting it. In place of the elastic method, which adapted the demand to the variations of the season, for the sake of mere official convenience they placed upon the *rayat* all the risks of a bad season. Instead of taking the revenue in kind according to the amount of the crop, they fixed a rigid cash assessment on each field to be paid on a certain day, whether the crop was good or bad. The method of fixing an average demand, to be levied in cash irrespective of the crop, might suit the case of a capitalist farmer. But it was a heavy load on the back of the *rayat*, who living from hand to mouth was never allowed to make a demand upon the Government when he had not even food for himself and his family.

The principle, which was to govern land assessments, was first distinctly formulated in an elaborate despatch from the Court of Directors, December 17, 1856. It was declared that "the right of Government is not a rent which consists of all the surplus produce after paying the cost of cultivation and the profits of agricultural stock, but a land revenue only, which ought, if possible, to be so lightly assessed as to leave a surplus of rent to the occupier, whether he, in fact, lets the land to others or retains it in his own hands." And Sir Wedderburn proves from documents that the instructions of the Secretary of State limiting the amount of the Government demand were entirely disregarded in practice and that by arbitrary

enhancements of rent the *rayat's* improvements had been confiscated and he was compelled to make up the Government demand by stinting himself and his family in food, and by borrowing from the money-lender. In this light if we look on Warren Hastings' report to the Directors of the East India Company as quoted before and the public insinuation of the Governor-General's name with infamy and coercion, we are naturally led to believe that his report had been written with enough caution so that the authority would be pleased to grant farther prolongation of service to the Governor-General in consideration of his good behaviour.

Before Britain obtained authority in India the "continent was self-contained", writes *India*, a monthly magazine of London devoted to Indian causes and affairs in its January issue of 1891. Agriculture was always the mainstay ; industries, nevertheless, played an important part in the general economy, while all profits arising from land and industry were circulated in the land in which they were earned. All is now changed. Britain, after first destroying nearly all Indian industries, takes the profits made in India, and spends them out of the country. There is a deep and

"A MONUMENT OF OUR FAILURE"

"This catastrophe (the famine of Orissa and Bihar in 1856-67) must always remain a monument of our failure, a humiliation to the people of this country, to the Government of this country and to those of our Indian officials of whom we have been perhaps a little too proud."

—SIR STAFFORD NORTHCOTE,
Secretary of State for India,
 In the House of Commons,
August 2, 1867.

deepening poverty all over the land, such as the world has never before seen on so vast a scale. This state of things is brought about by 'the lamentable prostration of our old, many-sided, and balanced system of national industries,—a prostration which, by reducing the industrial classes in the country to one dead, low level of resourcelessness and helpless dependence,—renders impossible all material progress of the country, and, with it, any adequate provision for a normally expanding population.' (the single quoted lines have been taken from *Sarvajanik Sabha* pamphlet, published at Poona.)

Here are some official statements as to the conditions of the people about that time.

1. Sir Auckland Colvin in 1885 :

The masses of the people are 'men whose income at the best is barely sufficient to afford them the sustenance necessary to support life, living as they do on the barest necessities of life.'

GREAT DISTRESS IN FURREEDPORE
(From Our Correspondent)

I have no desire to be sensational ; in fact, there is no necessity for miscolouring, and I assure you the story of the reality of the present condition of the mass of the people about here cannot possibly be exaggerated. The poorest of the villagers are actually starving, and those who are but little better off in worldly goods must be in a like strait. The former have nothing but what they receive in charity to subsist on, and the latter have scarcely an ordinary meal during the twenty-four hours....The distress is extending, and unless relief measures are adopted promptly hundreds will die from want and starvation.

THE STATESMAN
December 7, 1890

2. The Government of India, 1888 :

There is evidence to show that in all parts of India there is an enormous population, which lives from hand to mouth, is always in debt...does not (cannot ?) save, and has little or nothing to fall back upon in bad seasons.

The evil in India has never been over-population, but under-production, and that under-production has been a necessary consequence of the system of an alien rule.

"In the Deccan districts of the Bombay Presidency, during my service about the year 1875," writes Sir William Wedderburn in an article entitled *The Starving Rayat*, published in *India*, March 1897, "when the money lenders refused to make further advances to their debtors, who already owed them far more than they could pay, the revenue officers of the Government were suddenly brought face to face with a very serious difficulty. Hitherto, however painful the process of finding the rupees had been to the *rayat*, it had all been as easy as shelling peas for the officials, as the mere threat of eviction sufficed to send *rayat* to the money-lender, and then the rupees were forthcoming. But when this source of supply had dried up, the Government officers had to take action on their own account. Accordingly, they proceeded to wholesale attachments of land ; and hundreds of holdings were sold by auction, realising only nominal prices. Looking to the attachment of their ancestral land, it is not to be wondered that these proceedings excited the most bitter exasperation ; but being unable to resist the Government, they turned their anger against their creditors. Agrarian disturbances broke out all over the districts, the money lenders were

attacked in their houses ; their bonds, decrees, and account-books were burnt ; and they themselves were driven out of the villages. These disturbances were put down by military force, and a mixed Commission, known as the Deccan Riots Commission, was appointed to enquire into the facts and causes of the outbreak. The enquiry was conducted in a most business-like way from village to village, the exact financial position of each *rayat* being ascertained, with the history and causes of his ruin. The five volumes of the Commissioners' Report contain the most trustworthy record in existence regarding the *rayat's* economic condition. Their conclusions in substance were : *first*, the *rayat* was driven to the moneylender by the harsh and rigid enforcement of the Government revenue demand ; *secondly*, once in the toils of the moneylender the *rayat's* case was hopeless, owing to the irresistible weapons furnished to the creditor by the Debt Courts. The Commissioners at the same time exploded certain time-honoured fallacies, such as the theory that the ruin of the *rayat* was caused by his extravagance in marriage and other ceremonies. They reported that for these purposes he did not spend more than what was reasonable under the circumstances. The conclusions of the Commission were accepted at the Viceroy's Council, but only the sins of the moneylender were taken into account, leaving altogether untouched the more serious sins of the Revenue Department."

Sir Wedderburn further states : "If in this country (England) a pauper died in the work-house from starvation, we should at any rate hold an inquest on his body ; and some one would be made responsible. Why should this sort of thing be tolerated in those who are responsible for deaths from starvation in an Indian famine ?"

Resulting from an early failure of rains in 1865 and the consequent destruction of the main rice crop due to be harvested in December a famine extended along the whole of the eastern coast from Calcutta to Madras and penetrated far inland. The districts of Mambhum and Singbhum in Chhota Nagpur as well as the Ganjam division in Madras suffered severely. This is the famine commonly known as the Orissa Famine of 1866. "The Madras Government of Lord Harris dealt effectively with the districts under its jurisdiction. The Bengal administration and the Government of India failed disastrously. The isolated province of Orissa was affected so terribly that probably nearly a million of persons died within its limits. The failure of the rains in that region was immensely aggravated in September, 1865, by floods from the rivers, which overwhelmed a thousand square miles of low-lying country and submerged for many days the homes and fields of a million and a quarter of people.

"Mr. W. W. Hunter writes about this particular famine in his *Orissa*

"In 1757 Clive fought the battle of Plassey, and wrested the adjoining Province of Bengal from the Delhi throne, The Mughuls lost Orissa only when they had ceased to be worthy of holding it. But wretched as the State of Orissa had been under the Mughuls, half a century of deeper misery remained for it under the Marhattas.

"In 1866, when rice rose to three-pence per pound, three-quarters of a million of men perished within six months, inspite of every effort of the Government. What, then, must have been the misery of the people in 1770, when silver had three times its normal purchasing power, and yet rice to six pence per pound? The natural scarcity

in Orissa was at least six times as great ; and instead of being mitigated, in 1866, by State importations and relief depots, it was intensified by a mutiny of foreign troops. While the people were dying by hundreds of thousands on every roadside, the Marhatta soldiery threw off the last vestige of control, and for many months ranged like wild beasts across the country.

"Nature has provided Orissa with rivers and local rainfall ; but the water which, if husbanded, would last all through the year, is allowed, in the space of a few weeks, to rush off to the ocean in destructive floods. During 35 years, from 1831-32 to 1866-67, the Government had to remit £257,939 of its Orissa rental for droughts alone, or £455,365 for the combined effects of droughts and floods. Inundations are more common, and in general more destructive, than droughts ; for, even, if the rivers fail, the Province has its own local rainfall of $62\frac{1}{2}$ inches a year in reserve. But a total absence of water produces the climax of misery. Nothing remains for the people but to die. In 1770, ten million peasants suffered the last agonies of hunger, and one-third of all Bengal lay waste and silent for twenty years. In 1866, the same Province suffered famine equally severe, but our modern facilities of inter-communication, and liberal although tardy, application of money, reduced the mortality to less than one-tenth of what it was in 1770, and only 750,000 British subjects died of starvation. One-fourth of the whole population of Orissa was, however, swept away.

"When I wrote that book (*Annals of Rural Bengal*), it seemed to me that the sole chance of safety for the Indian peasant depended upon filling the English imagination with the fact, that 50,000,000 of our fellow-subjects pass their lives in chronic risk of death by starvation. For centuries,

not a single generation of Indian husbandmen has gone through life without experiencing the extreme edge of famine. But during the past four years, the very measures on which I believed that the safety of rural India depended but which I then despaired of ever seeing carried into effect, have become the avowed policy of Government. I pointed out that the preventives of famine belong to two classes : those that tend to avert natural scarcity, and those directed towards the development or intervening breakwaters between natural scarcity and its actual pressure on the people.

Among the former, irrigation and drainage schemes stand first ; among the latter, increased facilities of transport and distribution, such as railways, roads, and canals. These, I said, are the specific of famine."

Suggesting the remedial measures of famine in general Mr. Hunter points out : the *first* series of efforts (engineering efforts) is directed to the control of the water-supply by a more scientific organisation of dykes and embankments to protect the Province from floods ;

The *second* series of efforts has borne more fruit. It consists of a great organization of canals, and is designed not so much to control as to husband the water-supply, and to ensure its economical application to the lands. This vast organization of artificial rivers is the work of the ten years following the famine. The East India Irrigation Company undertook by private English enterprise to do for the Orissa peasant what none of its dynasties, native or foreign, had ever ventured to attempt ; it would free him, namely from the chronic peril of drought and famine. But before the Company could finish a single one of their canals, the terrible disaster of 1866 fell upon the Province ; and during the next few years Government itself realized

the responsibility of preserving its people from death by starvation. Accordingly, on the last end of 1868, the State took over the whole works from the Company at an estimated price of £941,386 ; and since then it spent upto 1872 another half a million sterling. The people took the water in small quantities since 1866 ; but the slowness of the Indian peasant to adopt innovations, and the high rates for water fixed by the Company, prevented anything like irrigation on a large scale. The Commissioner of the Province firmly grasped the situation, and insisted upon Government reducing water rates to two shillings an acre.

The *third* series of efforts to free Orissa from famine is directed neither to the control nor to the husbanding of the water-supply but to rendering the crops of other provinces available for it in time of dearth. The silting up of the rivers intercepted its natural means of communication with the outward world. About 1862 the newly started East India Irrigation Company discerned its capabilities, and an enterprising French firm in Calcutta established an agency for the export of rice. False Point formed the main entrance by which food was thrown into Orissa during the dearth, and the Famine Commissioners urged its claims upon Government.

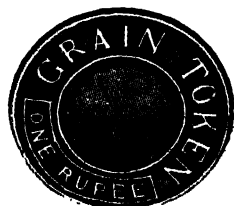
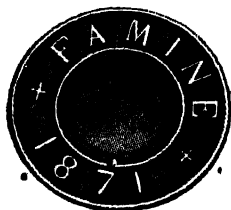
FAMINE OF 1874

The Famine 1874 was over : the death from starvation were so few compared to many millions concerned, that practically there had been no loss of life. The health of the people had been sustained, agriculture was unimpaired, the resources of the country remained uninjured, even the revenues were nearly all realized. But there had been a large expenditure which, however, had been exactly foreseen, and to which the Government had made up its mind before hand.

—SIR RICHARD TEMPLE

The outlay upon the control and distribution of the water-supply, and upon roads, harbours and other facilities for transport already amounted to about 10 million sterling since the famine; and to complete the present works would probably cost not less than half a million more. These two millions, at $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, represented an annual charge of £90,000 more than half the Government rental of the Province, or over 19 per cent of its entire revenue amounting to £464,868 in 1870, a year of income tax.

The slight and partial showers of the south-west monsoon in early June, 1877, had no effect on improving the condition of affairs. There were considerable quantities of grain in the districts of Bombay and the Deccan, and their



GRAIN TOKENS OF 1871

During the Bengal famine of 1871 Grain Tokens issued by Government were distributed free to the famine-stricken. In return for these tokens the distressed were each given a rupee worth of rice.

CALAMITY OF 1873

"Her Majesty's Government may rely upon the Government of India not shrinking from using every available means, at whatever cost, to prevent, so far as they can, any loss of lives of Her Majesty's subjects in consequence of the calamity which now threatens Bengal."

*— From a despatch sent by the Governor-General
to the Secretary of State for India*

November 7, 1873

steady increase in Calcutta, rendered the further provision for Madras Presidency somewhat precarious. The supplies from the north by rail averaged 800 tons daily. If a comparatively rich country like England was without a poor law, and the one-seventh or whatever may be the proportion of parish relieved paupers, who were usually assisted by private charity, and supposing the price of bread to be more than doubled, private charity would not continue to support the increased pressure with diminished means. The cry at that particular time was loud and keen in Great Britain, because the Russo-Turkish war had increased the price of bread 25 per cent ; in Madras it was nearly 200 per cent whilst there was no work for those needing work.

Through the pressure of the famine in Bombay, the silver ornaments and melted country silver discs were pouring in at the rate of nine lakhs of rupees worth per mensem. Some villages sold their brass vessels, their field implements, the thatch of the roofs, the frames of their doors and windows. Not only rice was at a prohibitive price, but all other articles of food were dear in proportion. Even cows, that fell so rapidly in price on account of failure of pasturage, were rising again because they were so scarce. The condition of the poor in the cities was melancholy in the extreme. The streets were thronged with living skeletons that, alas ! would soon cease to be living, and the suburbs were too pitifully sprinkled with recumbent emaciated frames covered with cloths, suggestive of laid-out corpses, although the majority of these were not yet dead. The police were indefatigable in picking up those waifs of dying humanity and taking them off to the relief camps ; but even the police could not be everywhere and prevent

all the sad sights that met one's eyes. (From an account given by the Mint Master of Bombay).

The famine was observed to have a very great influence on crimes. The central jails had their fill, yet additions were made daily. It was well-known that many persons deliberately committed crimes in order to have a prolonged board at the expense of the Government. Education was suffering, as many lads were dismissed from various schools because they were unable to pay the necessary fees.

On January 30, 1981, Mr. Hunter (Aberdeen) said in the House of Commons :

I beg to ask the Under-Secretary of State for India, whether he has any information that the district of Chingleput, Nellore, Cuddapath, North Arcot, South Arcot, Tinnevely and Malabar in Madras, with a population of about 12 millions, are threatened with famine and if so in view of the fact that, with the exception of Malabar, all those districts were famine-stricken in 1876 and 1877, some most severely, whether he will state what steps have been taken in the meantime to protect them from famine and what results, if any, have followed from such steps :

LARGEST RETURN OF DEATHS

"A Parliamentary Return has recently been issued showing that thirty one deaths have occurred upon which a coroner's jury have returned a verdict of death from starvation or death accelerated by privation. "Self neglect and irregular living" was the verdict in one instance, "exposure and self neglect" in another. If a similar return were issued for India of deaths for one year only from starvation and diseases caused by want of food and clothing, whether certified to by a coroner's jury or not, the Blue Book containing the particulars would be one of the largest ever published."

INDIA

June 5, 1891

Whether the primary cause of the threatening distress is the failure of the November rains :

Whether irrigated as well as unirrigated lands are threatened with crop failures.

Whether the Madras Government has taken any, and if so what, steps to carry out the declared intentions of the Government of India "that human life shall be saved at any cost and at any effort ; no man, woman or child shall die of starvation" ; and,

Whether he will lay upon the Table all the particulars received by the Secretary of State respecting the impending distress and also details as to the crop out-turns in the districts named in the years, 1888, 1889, 1890.

The Under-Secretary of State for India (Sir J. Gorst, Chatham) replied :

The latest reports that have reached the Secretary of State are dated, Madras, January 6 : A failure of the late crops was then feared in parts of the seven districts named. No fear of famine was expressed, and the prices of grains consumed by the poor were said to be well below scarcity level. Plans for opening relief works and for dispensing other relief are ready, if necessity arises.

In reply to the second paragraph of the question, I may say that the practical failure of the harvest has been due to the scantiness of the late rains or monsoons. Irrigated crops have also suffered in parts though not so seriously as the dry crops.

In reply to the fourth and fifth paragraphs of the question, my answer is that the Secretary of State has asked for fortnightly telegrams from Madras stating the condition of affairs, and the steps taken to relieve distress if it arises. These telegrams will be published. The Government have also been asked to furnish a statement of the general out-turn of crops in the threatened districts for the years named.

According to the census taken in April, 1891, the population increased since 1881 by thirty millions, and amounted to 285 millions. "An occasional flood may reduce this enormous population a trifle, failing an earthquake or a murderous war, the millions will keep growing. That they will outstrip the means of existence is almost as certain—for India—as the rising of the sun. A famine is what we see beneath the census returns—unless statesmanship can increase the food supplies of the peninsula." So wrote the *Evening News and Post*, a conservative paper. Another conservative paper, *Globe*, viewed the same population increase in the following way, "It is a frightful feature and involves a frightful responsibility."

This "frightful responsibility" how the British shouldered, was envisaged in an article, *The Spoilation of India : How it was Brought About*, by Mr. J. Seymour Keay, M. P. in *India*, April 10, 1891. Of all that he wrote, here are some passages.

"Of the gigantic loans raised from time to time for India's railways, the proceeds hardly touch her soil, before they are remitted back to England."

Here it is profitable to add what Mr. A.J. Wilson, Editor, *The Investors' Review*, City Editor, *The Standard*, wrote in his article, *The Economic Outlook for India*, published in *India*, March, 1897.

When the Home Government, after the Mutiny, took the direct responsibility of administering the affairs of India, the total direct debt for which the country was liable was under 70 millions sterling and the interest charges under 2½ millions. This was exclusive of about 26 millions raised to build railways under the costly and extravagant,

but popular, guarantee-of-the-State system, but the entire Home Charges did not amount to £8,000,000. Such charges in 1897 approached £20,000,000 exclusive of private remittances. The estimated population of the territories under the British rule was then about 172 millions, occupying an area of 840,000 square miles. And, the total debt load including railway capital expenditure, every penny of which had been borrowed, and an outlay of nearly fifty millions sterling on other "public works", stood nearly at £500,000,000. The entire capital and other obligations of the Government of India had to be all borne by the humble peasantry, a toiling population whose average yearly income per head was not even £5.

Mr. Seymour Keay, however, calculated the average income figure at only Rs. 27 per year.

"The poverty of the people of India is a fact which is notorious. It is well-known that the principal capital and stock-in-trade of the Indian cultivator consist of his plough and his oxen. The *ryat* has too little food for himself; nor his cattle get any grain whatever. Successive devastating famines have raised the idea in England that their recurrence is to be prevented, not, as would really be the case, by ceasing to drain the very life blood from the people but by an extension of irrigation in almost any sort of district and soil, and at almost any cost, and this already proved a perfect mine of wealth in the shape of appointments and salaries. It is the state of crushing poverty, and *not* any abnormal features of climate or rainfall, which makes famines more severe and recurrent than in earlier times.

The Hindu Prime Minister of Indore State published a memorandum on Famines in India, which Mr. Keay referred to in his article. The Minister traced the recurrence of famines since the earliest times to the decadence caused by the British administration. Thus he enumerated the past famines, "In the fourteenth century there was only one famine in India. In the fifteenth century it was the same. In the seventeenth century there were two famines. In the eighteenth there were eight famines. In seventy-seven years of the nineteenth century there were more than twelve famines. (Mr. Keay takes the figure for eighteen.)

What does a modern Indian famine mean? Simply this, that, taxed to an extent quite disproportionate to their yearly decreasing crops, the people are now too poor to retain and eat the produce of their own soil, which goes to the foreigner in payment of the taxes, while the poorer classes of the inhabitants are left to die. Yet we are told never to forget that the enlarged exports of India are unanswerable proofs of its prosperity. But a truer test of prosperity does lie neither in the increase of population nor in the enlargement of export but in the death rate of India. Although the registration of deaths is still very imperfect, this death rate is already known to be something appalling, being not far from double that of Great Britain.

About the death rate in India, the *Pioneer*, a journal well-known to be the organ of the English official class in India, wrote on February 7, 1880.

"The hired labourer is always on the verge of starvation. Out of the 190,000,000 in British India labourers are estimated at 30,000,000. Last year after the heavy rainfall there was frightful mortality from fever," according to the recent sanitary report, an increase of over 900,000 on

the average rate of mortality. There would appear to be a good deal of truth in the opinion of one officer, who reported that the disease is aggravated by want of food, which all the times prevails amongst the lowest classes."

As Lord Dufferin's period of rule was drawing to a close, his British conscience began to trouble him concerning the condition of the people under his governance. Sir William Hunter's forty millions of starving folk, Sir Charles Elliot's admission respecting the never-ceasing hunger of half the agricultural population, and other observations of a like kind, combined with the political fervour which the National Congress was causing, made Lord Dufferin uncomfortable. Just before his last year of office began, that is, on August 17, 1887.—the Viceroy issued a circular in which he said :

The attention of the Government of India having been called to the frequency with which the assertion has been repeated that the greater proportion of the population of India suffers from a daily insufficiency of food, it is considered desirable to ascertain whether this impression is wholly untrue or partially true; and in the latter case, to attain some idea of the extent to which it is so, and how far any remedial measures can be suggested.

Lord Dufferin ordered that "an inquiry should be quietly and confidentially instituted by the Department of Land Records and Agriculture in communication with selected officials of experience and judgment, care being taken that whatever evidence is brought forward should be of a positive and trustworthy character." The inquiry was made. In October, 1888, fifteen months after the instructions were given, and two months before Lord Dufferin left India, a resolution was published. While

not denying there was suffering, the resolution declared that there was no occasion for undue alarm.

The *Anti-Jacobin* (a weekly journal in England (conducted by Mr. Frederick Greenwood, a paper Tory to the back-bone) published in August, 1891, an article significantly headed, *Indian Bread for British Mouths*, wherein was described the rather formidable riot which had taken place at Benares in April, 1891. The article stated that riot "was attributed primarily to some interference with a small temple by the construction of new waterworks, but also to the underlying cause of distress produced by the high price of bread-stuffs." In *India*, as in the columns of the *Anti-Jacobin*, the fault of the disturbance and disastrous conditions of things was laid on the large exports of wheat, not altogether wisely, although, no doubt, the exports—under the circumstances—constituted a factor in the problem.

In the *Pioneer* in this country was written :

"There is a deep feeling of serious uneasiness prevailing more or less throughout the seething mass of the poorer people of India in these days, is a fact well-known to all those who are familiar with the lower strata of native society throughout the country. What is the cause ? There may be more than one reason for this state of affairs, but it is pretty evident that the chief cause is the very high price of the staple articles of the daily food of the people."

In the House of Commons, on June 7, 1891, Mr. Samuel Smith (Flintshire) asked the Under-Secretary of State for India, Sir J. Gorst, Chatham :

Whether the attention of the Government has been drawn to the distress among the pariahs, or low class agricultural population of Chingleput, Madras ;

Whether he can give any information regarding the amount of their distress, and whether their lamentable condition is chronic in its nature ;

Whether any measures have been adopted by the Government of Madras to ameliorate their condition in addition to what is being done to deal with the distress caused by the famine ;

Whether the Government have appointed any Commission to inquire into the distress ;

And, whether the low caste population can acquire waste land for cultivation, like the caste *mirassidars* or lease-holders.

The Under-Secretary replied : "The present distress has attracted the attention of the Madras Government to the

In the village of Abashev, in the district of Samara, 40 bushels of rye were distributed in October among 699 people. This was about $3\frac{1}{2}$ pounds apiece per month—less than an eighth of a pound per person per day !

Furthermore, not all the starving got even this amount. Only those who were not able to work were entitled to it. That is, children upto 15 years of age and old people beyond 55 years of age. Only half the family were fed. To those over 15 and under 55 they said :

"Go to work" !

General Annikov, who was in charge of the work, ordered that all who refused to work should be flogged and sent back to their home towns under guard.

Meantime in the cities walls were plastered with such announcements as : "A Concert to Help the Starving," "A Charitable Bazaar for the Starving," "A Dancing Party for the Starving." Petitions were sent round and the very people who were growing rich on this starvation would sign up for 10, 15, or sometime as high as 40 roubles to establish free soup kitchens.

—RUSSIAN FAMINE OF 1891.

condition of the poorer classes in Chingleput. A careful statistical survey is being made of each district in Madras. The Chingleput district will be taken up soon, and inquiry will be made into condition of all classes of people. At the inquiry of 1887-88, the results of which are given in the *Condition of the people* return presented in June, 1889, it was stated that Chingleput, owing to its infertile soil, and to certain accidents of tenure, was among the most backward parts of the Madras Presidency. The mass of Chingleput people, who are mostly, agriculturists live from hand to mouth and in adverse seasons are seriously hampered. The wages of an agricultural labourer's family are put at about ten rupees a month all told. The demand for all kinds of industrial labour other than weavers is increasing, while unskilled labour is, owing to the vicinity of Madras, everywhere better than it used to be. No special measures for the general improvement of the Chingleput people have been undertaken, beyond the repair of tanks and channels for irrigation. Extensive measures have been taken and are being carried out for the relief of distress caused by the recent failure of rain. No Commission has been appointed to inquire into the distress. There is no bar of law or of practice to low caste people obtaining and cultivating available waste lands on the same terms as high caste people.

On July 27, Dr. Tanner (Cork, Middlesex) asked the Under-Secretary of State for India :

If there was any foundation for the report from Bombay that a famine was regarded as inevitable in the North-West Frontier Province in consequence of inadequate rainfall ;

And if so, what steps were being taken or would be taken for the relief of distress.

Whereon the Under Secretary, Sir J. Gorst, read out a telegram which had been received from the Viceroy on the very day by the Secretary of State. It stated :

There is an improvement in agricultural prospects and development of monsoon season. There has been good general rainfall throughout the country except of Madras, Carnatic and Upper Burma, in consequence of which there is no present cause for anxiety in Northern India. Strong monsoon was blowing over west coast. More rain imminent in Punjab and Rajputana where fodder famine has been arrested by rain. Crop operation in Northern India is generally progressing satisfactorily, and there is no present cause for anxiety in North West Provinces and Oudh with development of monsoon in Northern India, locust plague abating. In Northern India prices are abating where there is rain.

But information was incomplete.

"The millions of starveling keep up their grim procession from birth to death", with which striking metaphor did the *Madras Times* of September 15, 1891, described the condition of a large proportion of the people of India. "There are millions," the paper continued, "who, from the day they are born to their enfeebled child mothers, until they sink into their premature graves, never know what it is to have the sufficiency of food which alone can give a race stamina. They exist on the verge of slow starving to death." Since 1883 the Government of India had been aware of this condition of things, but no real attempt was done to grapple with so scandalous a condition of things.

WHAT WRONG IN BENGAL

EARLY, in January, 1943, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, the Governors of Bombay, Assam and the Punjab, the Member-in-charge of the Food Department, the Hon'ble Mr. N. R. Sarker, and the other members of the Viceroy's Executive Council met together in several Conferences, all held at New Delhi, to discuss the food situation in India. Two questions were the uppermost : *First*, the need for an equitable distribution of foodstuffs in cities and large towns, which, in other words, meant rationing. The urgency for such arrangement arose out of the fact that it was apprehended that persons with large purses might buy over their requirements to the detriment of the poorer classes. *Secondly*, the need for lifting off the market as much *military demand for wheat* as possible and meeting it with import from Australia.

The total consumption of wheat in three months upto April was estimated at 500,000 tons. 60,000 tons of Australian wheat had already been landed in India. The Punjab Government agreed to distribute 225,000 tons of wheat at reasonable prices. Assam could meet the civil and military needs of rice in the province and besides, send some to other provinces for civilian use.

The *Times* wrote on January 13 : "Faced by acute local deficiencies in several parts of India, notably in Bombay and Calcutta and in Bombay Province, the Government of India are contemplating further measures to meet food difficulties which have caused increasing anxiety since November last (1942)."

The Secretary of State, Mr. L. S. Amery said in the House of Commons on January 21: "The food situation in India is causing considerable anxiety. Last year's



By courtesy of C. M. Ga

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food crops were in general, satisfactory, but the *loss of Burma rice*, of which about 1,500,000 tons normally go to India, coupled with the increased demands for the Army and the serious *failure of the millet crop* in certain parts have caused prices to rise and food to become in many parts not only dear but scarce."

In November, 1942, food deficiency in some parts of the country had been apparent. In January conferences and parleys sat to determine the ways and means for successfully meeting the troubles. The *problem* was primarily and *mainly to be one of distribution*, Mr. Amery revealed in the House of commons. He further admitted that there was shortage in urban areas and in a few rural areas where crops had failed. In a situation as above, poor harvest was admittedly the first cause (which both Mr. Amery and the *Times* of London admitted) and in the next, a number of different causes assembled together to throw the normal balance between food-stock and consumption out of all proportions. These causes, according to the *Times*, were loss of Burma rice, needs of the Army, ancient (?) practice of hoarding and evasion of Government control. •

But one thing we must remember here that the shortage of crop was one of wheat (millet) in the main which was arranged to have been made up with Australian supplies if not, Canadian also or release of the surplus stock in the Punjab.

The remedies for the situation, were suggested by the Secretary of State as follows : "Centralization in the Food Department of a number of administrative functions to arrange for *purchase of wheat* and other grains by Govern-

Before the hungry even God does not appear except in the shape of bread.

—MAHATMA GANDHI, 1921.

ment agents from the producing areas ; dealing with hoarding and profiteering ; individual rationing in urban areas ; and *supplying of wheat to India* from overseas."

During the third week of January, the newspapers of London made the food situation in India their "popular" subject for comment. The *New Statesman* and *Nation* wrote : "Faced with this situation, the Bureaucracy, until the other day, did nothing though shortage had been growing for the last six months (according to the *Times*, since November, 1942). In the present instance its plea was that it has no powers, as food was a provincial question, that is rubbish." The *Times* wrote : "Faced by concurrent diminution of supplies and increase of prices the Government of India have now taken two important steps. They have made arrangements with the Imperial Government whereby substantial *supplies of wheat* will be shipped to India during the coming months and they have *removed the price control of wheat* and instituted Government purchasing agencies in all surplus areas."

Is there a real grain shortage in the country ?—the Hon'ble Mr. N. R. Sarker gave a question to the journalists at a press conference held at New Delhi on January 25. Himself he went on to explain the position with statistics : "Assuming the wheat and other *rabi* crops to be only equal to those of the last year (whereas there is every indication that they will be better) the out-turn this year (*i.e.* 1943), *will not be more than 5 per cent below the average out-turn plus imports of Burma rice* for three years previous to the war. It is true that we have to provide supplies for the Defence Department which are considerably in excess of the pre-war scales, but if it is remembered that in no less than five of the previous ten years the statistical

position of India in respect of available food-grains was worse than the anticipated position this year, (i.e. 1943), and on one occasion the shortage was as high as 14 per cent. There seems on these grounds to be *no cause for alarm*."

Are the present difficulties due to excessive exports from the country?—the next question he gave the journalists. He answered himself: "The average annual exports of food-grains from India from the beginning of the war to the end of November, 1942, including military as well as civil consignments, are appreciably less than the average annual exports for the three years immediately preceding the war which amounted to between only 1 and 2 per cent of the foodgrains production of the country."

What then are the causes attributed to the difficulties of the situation?—he pointed out two causes: *viz.*, (1) general lack of confidence and (2) tendency for hoarding to provide against the danger of future shortage.

In India well above the propaganda of the National War Front is heard the wail of the famine-stricken in Bengal, Rachael weeping for her children would not be comforted.

THE GUARDIAN, MADRAS

Villages must be educated to keep what they have and induce cultivation of fresh crops wherever water is available.

MAHATMA GANDHI, as he foresaw this famine,
JANUARY, 1942

Under the present system of government responsibility for breakdown inescapably rests in the last resort upon authority in Britain, and its immediate representative here! Every British citizen is necessarily shamed and sullied when his Indian fellow subjects die of starvation in Bengal.

—THE STATESMAN

On January 27 in the House of Lords the Under-Secretary of State for India, Lord Munster, said: "The food situation in India is difficult but it is *not* a famine situation. The shortage affects only urban and a few rural areas."

On the following day in the House of Commons, the Secretary of State for India, said: "There is no famine and no wide-spread prevalence of acute shortage, though a large part of the urban population is undoubtedly affected".

Till the end of January no acute shortage in the country was anywhere appreciated except some deficit in wheat.

On February 9, 1943, the Central Food Advisory Council concluded its two-day sitting. It made some recommendations on the "Grow More Food" campaign, utilization of waste-land, conversion of refuse into manure.

Mr. N. R. Sarkar, Food Member, initiating a two-day debate in the Central Assembly on February 15, declared: "The net gap in our total supply of foodgrains during 1943 after taking into account the increase in our requirement will not exceed 20,50,000 tons, representing a *deficit of no more than 4 per cent* in our total annual production of principal foodgrains." It was learnt that an expert from the British Ministry of Food was coming to advise the Government of India on the food situation. *Australian wheat*, received by the military was released against stocks in the Punjab *to allay the immediate scarcity*. The *Kharif* crop production was well over 2,000,000 tons in excess of the production in the previous year, and the new *rabi* was expected to be the largest in the country. It was known that *exports and Defence Services used only a per cent of the entire food-production* of India, and it was equal to what India had exported before the war. Towards the

end of January Mr. Amery declared that the Government of India would *prohibit* all *exports of foodstuffs after March*. A scheme was proposed that the Central Government would undertake to supply foodgrains from surplus to deficit provinces.

At the Bengal Council on February 24 the Minister for Agriculture stated that the estimated production of rice in 1942-43 was 6,938,800 tons and the estimated amount of consumption was 9,266,800 tons.

On March 1, the appointment of a Minister for Civil Supplies was announced in the Bengal Legislative Assembly; and a scheme for rationing Calcutta and the adjoining industrial areas was known to have been drafted during the first week. On March 10, a three-day debate on the Government policy regarding supply of food, fuel and cloth in Bengal concluded. The Chief Minister, Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq admitted the situation to have been extremely grave. "During the last one year while we have not been able to import rice for Burma our own *production in Bengal has been anything but sufficient*. The Minister for Commerce and Labour, the Nawab Bahadur of Dacca, said, "Loss of imports from Burma, denial policy, military demands, normal commitments to Bihar and Assam and hoarding on a fairly extensive scale have tended to create local shortages. The Government propose to create and maintain a reserve of paddy or rice to be thrown on the market whenever necessary at moderate prices under a system of free trade. Price control of rice has already been released.

The immediate recovery of Burma is the quickest solution of the Food problem.

—INDIAN SOCIAL REFORMER

The *import of wheat* into Calcutta, which was 18,000 tons a month normally, has during the last six months totalled only 25,965 tons. In January the supply was a little as 587 tons." The idea behind decontrolling prices was to draw hoarded rice into market,

The recommendations made at the second All-India Food Conference at New Delhi in February resulted in the appointment of the Regional Food Commissioners for co-ordination between the centre and the provinces and for control of food supplies (movement). *Australian wheat* arrived in India by the third week of March.

In the Bengal Council on March 23, 1943, the Ministry escaped defeat by a very narrow margin. The debate lasted for four days. It was revealed that Bihar Government had agreed to export 40,300 mds. of paddy into Bengai between January and April; Government of Orissa had agreed to release 2 lakhs mds. of rice to Bengal; Assam Government had promised 10,000 mds of rice.

In the Bengal Assembly on March 26 and 27, the Bengal Ministry outlived 'another censure motion made on their failure to deal with profiteering and hoarding in food-stuffs. At the debate Mr. Fazlul Huq said: "I have never been anxious for office, and during the last few months I have told His Excellency to take steps to constitute a National Government for Bengal." It was revealed that in 1942 Bengal Government had purchased 10,23,611 mds. of rice from denial areas, whereof 68,750 mds. had been sold to Ceylon.

Government must accept full responsibility for providing foodgrains and other essential commodities so that people may not wither away.

DR. S. P. MOOKERJEE

By April 6, restrictions regarding *movement of rice* in the province were somewhat *relaxed*.

Mr. Justice Braund, Regional, Commissioner for Civil Supplies said over Calcutta radio on April 11: "Production of rice before the war in India was 29,500,000 tons and import from Burma was 1,500,000 tons. Thus what had been *lost to India from Burma was only 5 per cent.*" On April 17, the scheme for food census was announced.

During the last week of February 1943, Bengal's deficit in rice for 1942-43 was known to have been 2,328,000 tons, which was about one-third of the total production. The Chief Minister was not much perturbed; he said, "production in Bengal was even anything but sufficient"—a colourless conclusion. Still, Bengal did not even attempt to fail in supplying military demands, or in meeting the commitments to Bihar and Assam. Though wheat supplies to Bengal were of very small quantities in January; in March Australian wheat arrived at Calcutta. During the last week of March it was known that Bihar Government would contribute 40,000 mds. and Orissa Government 200,000 mds. and Assam Government 10,000 mds., that is, more than 9000 tons up to April. Besides, in 1942 Bengal Government had purchased 10,23617 mds. whereof 68,750 mds. had been sent to Ceylon. Hence, Bengal's make-up in rice deficit went to the extent of 9,000 tons and 34,722 tons (denial area rice) or 43,722 tons up to April. At the same time all-India food deficit was accounted for no more than 4 per cent of the annual production, or 5 per cent at most, the import of Burma rice having been taken into consideration. Exports and Defence services used only 2 per cent of the total food production. And shortage was more of wheat than of rice,

or even if there was shortage of rice that could be made up with wheat imports from Australia. In April the food-situation in Bengal was somewhat eased with relaxation of all restrictions that had been put on all foodstuffs movement within and among the provinces.

With May the new Ministry was installed in Bengal. Under the Foodgrains Control order the Governor empowered certain Government officials to inspect premises and food-stocks. It was the *aim of the new Ministry to liquidate all the hoards* in the province.

Addressing a press conference at Calcutta on May 13, Major General Wood, Secretary, Food Department, Government of India, gave statistics regarding production and stock of foodgrains in Bengal. "The *average annual production of rice* over five years 1936-37 to 1940-41 was 8,181,000 tons. The current year's (1942-43) estimates of rice production have been 6,916,000 tons and the estimate of carry-over of rice from the previous year, 1,000,000 to 1,500,00 tons. The 1942 *Bengal crop was an astonishingly high one* and the best for over a decade. *It was 1,800,000 tons over the five years' average.* Besides, the *Central Government* have decided to make available to Bengal from elsewhere a total of 550,000 *tons of rice and cereals.* The *resources of Bengal in 1943*, in terms of rice, may be taken as 7,916,000 tons plus 550,000 tons or a total of 8,466,000 *tons against the past average production figure of 8,181,000 tons.*" Then, denial rice, purchased during 1942,

Conditions in Bengal seem to be as serious as even in spite of declarations to the contrary.

—MRS. VIJAYALAKSHMI PANDIT

was 30,000 tons, which was disposed of as Reserved and consumed by the civil population in Bengal 27,400 tons; exported to Ceylon 2,500 tons; handed over to Army 100 tons; exported through the port of Calcutta from April, 1942 to February, 1943 (the greater portion not being the produce of Bengal), 48,480 tons; otherwise purchased in Bengal for the Army during the last 12 months since February backwards, 7,000 tons.

Dr. Radha Kamal Mookherjee, Head of the Department of Economics, Lucknow, contradicted Major General's statement :

Bengal's average output of rice 10,217,000 tons (Food Production Conference, April, 1942); Major General's figure—8,181,000 tons; Imports—200,000 tons; Current year's Production—6,96,000 tons; *Shortage*—3,50,1000 tons.

Mr. D. N. Sen, Secretary, Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, argued : *Normal Consumption* of the province (taking average of three years 1937, 1938 1939)—9,278,000 tons; Major General took the lowest figure; Carry-over not likely to exceed 500,000 tons (having taken that nearly 10 per cent of the people have sufficient power to lay by anything); Major General did not take into account the total coastal and other trades. Mr. U. N. Burman, Minister for Agriculture, disclosed the *exported amount of rice* during 1943 only to be 2,84,000 tons.

Mr. Azizul Huq announced on May 17 free movement of foodgrains in South-east India, Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Oudh and the Eastern States, and he was protested.

Since 1901 to 1941 a growth of 200 persons per square mile is indicated in the census. The yield of rice in 1910 was 24,56,000,000 mds. In 1941 the yield was 29,90,600,000 mds, whereas the annual requirement was 29,00,000,000 mds.

The Bengal Foodgrains Enquiries and Control Order was promulgated on June 7, and anti-hoarding drive was launched. This drive, having evaded the real issue, was protested against by the citizens of Calcutta at a public meeting on the eve of the operation.

Full control over supplies and distribution, and rationing, to regulate consumption, were recommended at the Bengal Food Conference held on July 3. A day after in the Bengal Legislative Assembly the Minister of Civil Supplies, Mr. H. S. Surahwardy declared among other things :

"Our first act was to abolish the zonal barriers. *Food drive* has restored confidence amongst the poor and has transferred panic to the minds of the hoarders."

At the three-day debate in the same Assembly from July 12 to July 14 several harrowing facts were reviewed :

Many people were lying on one meal a day and some even without that.

Near the dustbins in Calcutta half-starved women and children hunt in the filth for a morsel of food.—MAHARAJADHIRAJ OF BURDWAN.

It was a major national crisis. A special Motion censured Ministry in their handling the situation.

Mr. Surahwardy *has no food drive statistics* but the general picture is that in most places a deficit has been reported.—A. K. FAZLUL HUQ.

The Bengal Government was organizing the province on a famine basis : establishment of gruel kitchens ; gratuitous relief ; test relief works ; agricultural loans. And the Government of India's decisions were :

Necessary steps to adjust deficits and surpluses ;
Vigorous procurement scheme ; Expediting *transport of foodgrains* ; An *antihoarding drive* ;
Rationing in urban areas.

Mr. Amery said in the House of Commons on July 14 : The difficult food situation in India was due to the widespread tendency of the cultivators to withhold foodgrains from the market, to larger consumption per head as a result of *increased family income*, and to *hoarding*. On July 19 the three-day debate on Food in the Bengal Council concluded. Food Minister Suhrawardy hoped for a great achievement in the anti-hoarding drive. On July 23 *foodgrains movement from Calcutta was prohibited*.

With the new Ministry coming into power a great stress was laid on the hoarded stocks in the province. Even food-drives were carried through, but to no great relief. What does this tell us ? Either nobody or only a few in the province had an excess to lay by, or the hoarders were a class much above in power over the general public.

Major-General Wood's statement on Bengal's food situation might or might not aim at a purpose. He declared an excess of foodgrains above the five years' average. However, his declaration was set aside by several other statements. But where had those counter-statements been at the outset of the year when the all-India deficit was shown at all costs to have been no more than 4 to 5 per cent ? Those statements could have made the situation easier ! However, statistics have proved to be unreliable in the face of facts. Or how export of

People uprooted from their homes and without any resources migrate to the towns in search of food. This disproves the charge of hoarding which has often been brought against the cultivator.

rice could be effected from Bengal to the amount of 28,400 tons when enormous shortage had been evident ?

At this stage free movement of foodgrains was announced. It was no doubt salutary to bring easiness in trade movements, which is expected to do more good than restriction can effect. But what with free movement if foodgrains were constantly drained off. Here, we shall remember Bengal's commitments to the neighbouring provinces and rice export to Ceylon. Free movement in trade is only then effectively wholesome if other cash-crops, besides food-grains, may bring in foodgrains from other places.*

When shortage was sternly palpable only then problems like increased population in the province and increased family income were being put forward.

Towards the end of July again the movement of foodgrains from Calcutta was prohibited. Here a question may be asked, why was there such a play of fast and loose with prohibition ? When Bengal's position was first revealed, the neighbouring provinces were willing to help Bengal. That was towards the last two weeks in March. Probably, some grains were rushed into Bengal by traders, where inflation (due to increased war-effort, which was much more evident in Bengal than in any other neighbouring province) and scarcity (to some extent natural and to great extent forced) were enough powerful to raise the prices of rice and other foodgrains. At this time movements of rice were freed from restrictions. And, the other provinces opposed this imposed freedom of movement. They feared that Bengal could draw in a lot from outside.

* Sir Bartley Frere's opinion in this respect may be consulted —Ibid.

This great shortage in Bengal had not been forewarned about. It follows that whatever the foodstock, it was never so enormous in quantity. Why was this? It goes without explanation that what foodgrains especially came into Bengal went out of the province. Around this one evil gathered others, which anybody watching the scenes in Bengal would count as follows : the fall of the Ministry and its replacement, hectic search for methods of allaying the distress threatening the province, a dark despair about Bengal's food situation explained according to various reasons as inflation, increase of population hoarding by cultivators and what not.

With all the reasons found, nothing could save the unfortunate province. The order restricting movement of foodgrains from Calcutta was a desperate attempt to keep the city on its feet so that war-efforts might not suffer.

During the first week of August the Bengal Relief Committee headed by Sir Badridas Goenka, Dr. Shyama Prosad Mookerjee and Dr. B. C. Roy issued an appeal to the public for contributions towards relief work.

The Central Government stopped further exports of rice from India. The inter-provincial barriers on trade in foodgrains were reimposed in the eastern region from August 1. The first cheap popular canteen was opened in Calcutta on August 4. Rationing and Price Control in India were discussed in the House of Commons. The two-day food-drive in Calcutta completed on Sunday, August 8. In several houses stocks in excess of the requirement units were stated to have been discovered. But those discoveries led to no startling results.

On August 9, 1943, Sir Azizul Haque, Food Member, described the difficulties that the Government had to face :

"The last rice crop was effected by weather conditions cyclone and flood. And, rice constitutes by far the biggest acreage in the country. The estimated all-India *rice shortage was about 2 million tons*. But while the deficits and surpluses of other areas almost cancelled each other, the province of *Bengal* representing about one-third of the total acreage of rice in India, was *deficient by about 1½ million tons* (same as the figure given by Major General Wood) against the normal average."

Sir Azizul Haque placed the blame of shortage on weather conditions over which there could be no human control. Major General Wood, however, held the loss of Burma responsible for the grave calamity in Bengal. The figures of shortage, though differently interpreted by different responsible persons, and even though somewhat different in amounts, could not be completely wiped out of the food accounts.

"We are just at the time considering the feasibility of gradually restoring *free trade throughout India* as
 • the only other means of ensuring a steady supply, thereby *bringing down the general price level* and distributing supplies commensurate with the needs of the various parts of India."

It is a pity that Sir Azizul Haque who had shown such a firm grasp of the problem, should at the juncture hand over his charge of Food to Sir J. P. Srivastava.

During the Food Debate in the Council of State on August 13, 1943, Sir Jwala Prasad declared : "The Government of India have been striving in real earnest, in the face of difficulties both inherent in the problem and man-made, to see that food is made available to every one in the

country whether by making the hoarders disgorge, or by encouraging the growth of more food, or by imports."

Sir J. P. repeated almost the same assurance given by Mr. Sarker some seven months ago. In Sir J. P.'s speech there is, however, an additional assurance of import. Initiating the same debate, wherein Sir Srivastava delivered the above speech, Major General E. Wood, Secretary, Food Department, stated ; "The task of securing that 400 million people were fed was a gigantic undertaking. Bengal has lost her rice imports from Burma. These normally averaged about 500,000 tons a year, but against this she normally exported 350,000 tons and therefore, she has, on the current rice year (1942-1943) against a normal harvest of something short of 9 million tons."

Another important event towards the close of the third week in August was that the food movement control powers were restored to the provincial governments, and the different provinces imposed bans on foodgrains export.

On August 22, it was declared in a Government of India *Press Note* that the foodgrains export from India to Ceylon, the Persian Gulf countries and Africa during 1942-43 was 370,000 tons, while from January to July, 1943—wheat 21,165 tons, and rice 70,972, total 92,101 tons. During the seven months since January, 1943, export of rice from Bengal was 7,000 tons against an import of 70,000 tons. The Government of India stated that the total requirements of the Defence Service in India of wheat and rice were 500,000 tons and 144,000 tons respectively, and these figures represented only $\frac{1}{2}$ of the total amount of wheat produced annually in the Punjab and $\frac{1}{60}$ of the total annual production of rice in Bengal.

Since August 28 the maximum wholesale price of rice

was fixed by the Bengal Government as follows : August 28—Rs 30/-, September 10—Rs 24/-, September 25 Rs. 20/-.

The new Governor of Bengal, Sir T. G. Rutherford met on September 7 the leaders of the commercial community. Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy, who had assured in the last week of August of food supplies from outside, explained the reason why Punjab wheat was selling dearer in Bengal. He added, "I shall be most happy to revise prices downwards still further if I am so advised by any costing adviser that the Government of India may be good enough to send to us for this purpose."

Orissa agreed to send 4 lakhs maunds of paddy and the Punjab 1000 tons of wheat for free distribution. Bihar also agreed to issue permits for rice export to Bengal.

The Hon'ble Mr. T. C. Goswami, Finance Minister, presented the *de novo* Budget for 1933-44 in the Bengal Assembly on September 14, wherein a huge deficit of Rs 7 crores 36 lakhs was disclosed to be due to measures for relief of distress in the provinces. The next day the Food Minister gave as many as *twelve* reasons for the then food situation in Bengal. They were failure of *Aus* crop in 1942 ; failure of *Aman* crop in 1942-43 ; havoc caused by Midnapore and 24-Parganas, destruction of paddy by pest ; the boat denial policy ; evacuation of the coastal areas ; refugees from Burma ; construction work of various types ; influx of consuming population in the shape of the military and great shortage of normal imports from other provinces. Of these dozen causes Mr. Suhrawardy made a plea for

We have done what has been humanly possible.

KHWAJA SIR NAZIMUDDIN, Bengal Premier

August 22, 1943

having done their best with the resources at their disposal still and having failed in coping with the situation.

On the same day, and curiously enough, at Lahore the Food Minister of the Punjab Government said in the course of a press interview : "There is absolutely no doubt that either the Bengal Government or the middle men, stockists and millers are making profits from wheat and wheat products, otherwise the prices in Bengal should be at parity with the Punjab prices."

On September 15, Bengal's rice was increased by 15,000 tons from the Punjab and 8,000 tons from the C. P.

Here, let us see how far the Bengal Ministry did their best in the famine. Bengal was short of 9 million tons of rice, according to Sir J. P. Srivastava. And, only 1½ million tons, according to Major General Wood and Sir Azizul Huq. According to Prof. R. K. Mukherji the shortage was about 4 million tons. According to yield in 1941 the shortage was 19 million tons. Of these figures the average is something more than 8 millions tons, whereas all-India shortage, taking loss of Burma rice and requirements by the military into account, was no more than 7 per cent in all.

Against all such gloomy figures in Bengal the following table of imports of foodgrains, prepared with all the figures quoted from various sources, will be illuminating.

	Rice	
	Export	Import
January-July, 1943 (according to Govt. of India Press note)	7000 tons	70,000 tons
January-March 15 (according to Mr. U. N. Burman, Minister for Agriculture)	2,840,000 tons	
August, Orissa to send		8,465 tons

Export	Import
Punjab to send	1,000 tons (wheat)
(Bihar also agreed to send, but no amount was known)	
Punjab despatched since August 15	50,000 tons (wheat)
(according to Food Minister, Punjab)	
Punjab's offer,	12,000 tons
Week ending Sept. 4	10,000 tons (grains)
Central Provinces	10,000 tons
(a substantial amount to be send to Bengal,	
Orissa to send	4,232 tons
Bengal Govt. Purchase	25,000 mds i.e.
on September 9	529 tons
Sind sent on Sept. 15	20,000 tons (wheat & rice)
Sind to send	15,000 tons
(In 16 days of September 18,000 tons of foodgrains arrived in Calcutta, according to a New Delhi report)	
Upto October 23, Delhi sent	115 tons (wheat)
(Hindusthan Times Fund)	
Sind (non-official help)	7,500 bags of rice i.e. 600 tons
(April-October ^o , foodgrains on Govt. account amounted to 180,000 tons of rice and 194,000 tons of other foodgrains.)	
Weekly import of foodgrains Oct.9-15	14,777 tons
U. P. July 15-Oct. 15	77,000 tons (foodgrains)
(Between Oct. 16-Oct. 23, four foodships, about 9,000 tons each arrived in India)	
Bengal Govt. purchase in the Punjab	
Sept. 6-Oct. 30	42,000 tons (wheat)
C. P. sends	4 wagaons of
non-officially)	foodgrains
Total	2,840,700 tons
	320,941 tons

Without export the entire foodstock in Bengal would have been 31,61,641 tons nearly the figure of shortage given by Prof. R. K. Mukherji. Four food ships brought 36,000 tons of wheat.

Then taking into consideration all the contributions sent from all over India and even from Great Britain, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, America the total monetary help would go to several millions of rupees.

On October 8, Sir Thomas Rutherford, Governor of Bengal, said over radio the following facts: Bengal's normal consumption per month—651,000 tons; after allowing for exports in 1942 and loss of a million & half tons of rice due to cyclone, flood and blight it appeared that the province had been short of the normal requirement by not less than seven week's food; from March to September approximately 415,000 tons were bought on Government account; "and if we can get 250,000 tons of some kinds of foodstuffs in the next three months we may turn the corner." We must remember that during the first week of October the number of famine deaths was the highest as recorded in Calcutta. From the figures of actual and probable imports it is known that the situation should have been turned long ago.

Now, examining the twelve reasons given by Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy that lay at the root of the unavoidable famine, we see that most of his reasons cannot stand before the Governor's account, as also before the figures of import and export.

Let us trace back to the week ending September 25. The prevailing Bengal Famine was discussed at the Bengal Assembly from September 17 to September 24. Amidst charges and countercharges, let us take note of Dr.

Nalinakshya Sanyal's grave allegations against the Ispahanis who were the sole agents of the Government of Bengal for purchase of foodgrains, and of the Food Minister's memorable say in reply : "No one who has money need starve." Did not both the things refer to a condition that food had been with the Government but nothing except better price could buy it ? The Government of Bengal did not declare famine in the province lest the responsibility of feeding the people should come upon the Government, whereas there existed several reasons which pointed towards mishandling of foodstock in the province and of the imports. Here, it should be said that non-official help to the distressed was enormously greater than Government relief work. When the rest of the country loosened its respective purse-strings in aid of Bengal, the provincial Government did not in fact strain itself to rise to the occasion. Mr. L. S. Amery in his first official statement on Bengal famine referred to the failure of local administration being responsible for the grave situation. According to him, about 1,700 tons of wheat were being brought to Calcutta

The idea of a Government reserve to meet the various difficulties arising from the caprices of native trade and from the actual insufficiency of local capital was not novel or original. It had been advantageously adopted in the North-West Provinces in 1873-74, and was the main feature of the policy of Lord Northbrook's Government during the Bengal famine. A knowledge that Government was in the market would immediately alarm the native trade and cause a simultaneous rise in prices. It was for this reason that government employed Messrs. Arbuthnot & Co., confidently, whose purchases of grain and re-sales had the effect of including other English firms to enter actively into grain trade where it was dangerously deficient and in promoting some activity in the retail trade and a slight downward tendency in prices.

by the Central Government but the fact remained that even with all such aids, the situation could not be set aright.

Regarding transport of foodgrains to Bengal, an India Government *Communique* stated : From April 1 to August 20, 1943, 161,722 wagons loaded with grains came to Bengal, compared with 141,072 in 1942. In September 1943 the normal daily average of the number of wagons carrying food-stuffs was 114. And, the tonnages of foodgrains, carried over E.I. Railways as it was elsewhere stated, were as follows :

1941	1,80,212 tons ;
1942	87,780 tons
1943	2,04,226 tons

So decline of proper distribution in the province was also stressed upon by Mr. L. S. Amery in his Birmingham speech (October 15), the only cause of the province-wide famine ; for this, the provincial Government alone was responsible.

The Lords of Great Britain showed their great concern for the disaster in Bengal. On October 26, the Labour Lord Huntingdon pointed out before the House that the loss of Burma rice had been a strong contributory cause (according to the Gregory Committee Report).^o Rice imported from Burma amounted to about 1½ million tons, of which less than 100,000 tons went to Bengal annually. The Bengal cyclone of 1942 and the failure of the monsoon in Madras were other contributory causes. On the other hand, these losses were largely made good by exceptional crops in Northern India in the spring of 1943. Grain bought for the Army and Army reserves must also be another contributory cause. "The situation," said Lord Huntingdon, "was foreseen a long time ago and had been developing for months." The Central Government should

have taken severest measures before famine reached the disastrous extent and went out of control. Lord Cato said : "The situation in Bengal has special causes. One of the most vital is the loss of Burma rice. The war has also brought about another serious problem, the problem of hoarding." Lord Hailey said : "The increase in India's production has preserved a somewhat reasonable ratio to the increasing population. But it has not left India in a state of normal sufficiency. Clearly the causes have been internal : mal-adjustment in transport, profiteering and hoarding. The Government of India could take drastic measures to control all prices of food-stuffs and force them on to the market." Lord Strabolgi said : "Lord Hailey has informed that India is self-supporting in food. But considerable quantities of food have to be exported from India for war purposes to the Middle East. Then, there is the fatal disease of bureaucracy—procrastination." Lord Munster, the Under-Secretary of State, said : "Despite the increased acreage which is under cultivation, the amount of food-stuffs available per head has in consequence of the vast increase in population remained practically stationary from year to year. Should anything occur to disturb the normal flow of trade between the small subsistent farmer and the great urban population a man-made famine is at once created. Bengal was enduring both forms of the disaster—man-made and natural."

The explanations which were given at the debate on the Bengal famine situation at the House of Commons, held on November 4, included bad harvest in certain parts of India, cutting of supplies from Burma and other parts of the Far East to India, creation of dual responsibility, reluctance of the provinces with surpluses to sell them to relieve the

shortage in the areas with deficit, individual hoarding, difficulty of transport, and inflation. To the last, i. e. inflation, Mr. Amery has more than often referred. Giving a picture of the general economic situation in the country as a whole the Secretary of State for India spoke to the members of the House of Commons: "Only the other day Lord Woolton told us that we are running into a world shortage. Since then Mr. Wallace, Vice-President of the United States of America, has declared that food will be a dominant problem in 1944. The Bengal famine is something more than an isolated incident. It is a danger signal warning us of long-range measures which are needed as well as immediate relief. There is the gravest long-range problem which India has to face. Every month there are over 300,000 additional mouths to be fed in British India alone." The great problem originating from the pressure of population on the land, as Mr. Amery suggested, must have to be solved by improved agricultural methods, by industrialization, and by education and social reform.

Though Mr. Amery often referred to inflation as a cause of the grave situation in Bengal, he stated it to be a contributory cause and not the main one. But Mr. Pathick

The fact is that foreign newspaper correspondents in India are not permitted to cable abroad even the bare facts of deaths and hospital admissions due to starvation issued daily in Calcutta by the Director of Information to the Bengal Government. Some account of the prevailing distress is permitted to be cabled provided the bare, horrible facts are toned down by descriptions of government measures to alleviate the distress—measures which are so often mere good intentions...Correspondents must not tell the British and the American public the blunt facts of the situation.

CIVIL AND MILITARY GAZETTE

Lahore

Lawrence was of opinion (with reference to his speech in the House of Commons) that since the general-index of prices had risen something in the nature of 300 per cent in India, inflation must have been the main cause of the last famine.

All India Index of Commodity Prices

Base—week ending August 19, 1939—100

January — 1943, 190

June (middle)—246

July (week ended July 10)—238

ECONOMIC ADVICER TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

It may be argued from the above figures that inflation was not the cause of famine in Bengal. For if those figures were enough for a famine situation then the entire country should have suffered. All the more, inflation would be more effective on the consumer's goods other than articles of food provided that food was sufficient. None could eat more, they could eat better stuffs. Yet, sympathetic rise in prices of foodstuffs might be possible. But the ever jumping black-market rates, for several edibles, especially rice, was not due to inflation but to some other causes. This was due to shortage, and we have seen why was this shortage and even, of what amount. Mr. Lawrence also took into account the shortage of graincrops.

"It was rumoured that the Company's servants had created the famine 1770 by engrossing all the rice of the country; that they had sold grains for eight, ten and twelve times the price at which they had bought them; that one English functionary who, the year before, was not worth a hundred guineas, had, during that season of misery, remitted sixty thousand pounds to London.

—MACAULAY

Here, Mr. Suhrawardy's statement, as—"No one who has money need starve", is only sarcastic.

According to Sir John Anderson, Chancellor of the Exchequer, the situation which developed in Bengal had been quite unforeseen. The rice harvest of 1941-42 was exceptionally good being definitely in excess of local requirements, and at the end of 1942 the then Chief Minister of Bengal, Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq, expressed his opinion that if Bengal was left to herself she could win through. With this statement may be contrasted Mr. Suhrawardy's reference to the failure of crops in both 1942 and 1943. "In 1942 the prospects of the main paddy crop were normal", continued Sir Anderson, "until fairly late in the year when a considerable part of west Bengal was stricken by a cyclone and devastated by the result of floods. Apart from these two causes the harvest might have been normal and we might have heard nothing at all of the famine in Bengal." Loss of rice due to these causes was about 1½ million tons, according to Sir Thomas Rutherford. Sir John also admitted of hoarding to be somewhat responsible for the situation. But who hoarded? The results of the food drives were quite illustrative in these respect.

Of all the causes of the last famine individual hoarding and profiteering, difficulty of internal and shipping transport, inflation, loss of Burma rice, and export of foodstuffs from India to the Middle East for war purposes were the direct outcomes of the war and inflation. The remaining causes were together, shortage of food production, pressure of increasing population, natural calamities like cyclone and flood, the Central Government's lack of foresight and reluctance to take drastic measures just in time to control prices of food and to effect its easy availability in the market, the

fatal disease of bureaucracy—i. e. procrastination, and even, according to some, the institution of provincial autonomy. If war was the only cause of famine the effect should have been felt country-wide and not in particular places. If shortage of food production and the pressure of increasing population were together the main causes of the famine, it is a pity that India could be overtaken by famine inspite of her being the land of rivers, the land of luxuriant vegetation and the land of golden harvest. The menace of ever-growing population, and the evil of diminishing returns of the soil might be counteracted if only the Government of India had the foresight of introducing tractor cultivation in the country. With this technological progress, the Union of Socialist Soviet Russia has within a score of years provided ample food for the people of the Union.

So, what is now urgently necessary in the country is not enforcement of rationing, nor indictment of persons on charge of hoarding or profiteering, nor restriction of food-grains passage from one locality to another but the fulfilment of Mr. N. R. Sarker's announcement at the very beginning of the last eventful year, 'Grow More Food'.

In this respect Dr. D.V. Bal, the Agricultural Chemist to the Government of C.P. and Berar gives both an immediate and a long-range programme. For immediate maximum food production comprehensive schemes should be drawn up for proper irrigation ; preparation of manure from farm wastes and town refuges should be started ; leguminous crops should be cultivated for the purpose of recuperation of soil fertility and of improvement of the existing ill-balanced diet of the people ; improved seeds are to be supplied to the

cultivators and State arrangements are to be made to counteract crop diseases and other damages : adequate area of pastures must be reserved for cattle feeding and the State should ensure minimum requirements in respect of food and clothing to every individual citizen. Dr. Bal assures, "If better methods of cultivation and manuring are adopted, it is possible to increase the food production by 25 to 30 per cent so as to adequately meet the food requirements of the country." Referring to the question of long-range problems in food production Dr. Bal stresses upon the necessity of conducting properly planned experiments to determine maximum crop production capacity of soils, upon the need for training a large number of young persons, upon colonization of new areas and utilization of demobilized soldiers and various motor vehicles and tanks at present employed on war work, upon the necessity to stabilize the incomes of agricultural labourers and cultivators, and upon the prevention of fragmentation of holdings.

And, with all efforts for improvement and increase of food-production, as Mr. Arthur Moore suggests (radio-talk from Dacca on March 26, 1944), an immediate change in the land tenure system is necessary. Mr. Moore said that a food crisis was a land crisis. A so-called permanent land-settlement, made 150 years ago, could not well be suited to to-day's different conditions and stresses. All that went with it urgently required unprejudiced handling. Cropping, the balance between food crops and cash crops, and the rotation of food crops needed regional planning. Communications, the use of motor engine and electricity, schools, technical training, hospitals, were far below any tolerable standard. But it was no good blaming anybody. "We are all in this and it is ourselves

we have to change before we can improve our surroundings," said he.

For over fifty years the question of land settlement and improvement has been raised in this country, and in Great Britain as well, many a time and oft, but what has resulted thereof? In the chapter, "Facts About Famines," I have collected various revealing factors which have made famine far more dreadful, if not very frequent, in this province. Alack, all salutary suggestions have remained in paper and in books, no body has cared to put those valuable suggestions into effect. There is no difference in attitude, in manner of action or in the measures taken between "then" and "now." When the world itself is aging, we are where we were half a century ago. We give various reasons for a situation which is really the effect of a very, very old cause. We may give a dog a different name, but what actual change the animal suffers thereby!

* * * *

Though the immediate cause of the last famine has been, as seen from different angles, export of food from Bengal even when the province's stock was far below the amount required, the permanent cause has been the old land-system, regarding settlement with the cultivator, or the way of crop production.

APPENDIX—I

Mortality in Famines

“ANSWERING a question in the House of Commons on October 14, 1943, Mr. Amery said that so far he understood, the death-rate in Bengal was estimated at about 1,000 a week, including Calcutta it might be higher. At that time in the city of Calcutta alone the weekly average mortality, as may be seen from the Government records was 525 and even more. Later, the Secretary of State admitted that there was dearth of accurate statistics, as there was no proper way of collecting them. The Health Officer, Calcutta Corporation, wrote: “Mortality in Calcutta continues to increase and the number of deaths recorded, during the week ended October 16 totalled 2,154 as against 1,967 during the preceeding week.”

Even in March, 1944, the official report of starvation deaths as recorded from the Calcutta hospitals showed the average of 5 per day. In February this average had been about 7, and in January much higher.

Between August 16 and August 24, 1943, the death-roll of the famine victims in Calcutta mounted to 122 ; between September 3 and September 9,—202 ; between October 1 and October 7—531 ; between November 1 and November 7—497 ; between December 1 and December 7—204.

The Anthropology Department of the Calcutta University has so far made two important studies relating to famine. According to the first, it is known that the agricultural labourers fared the worst ; and according to the second,

“It will probably be an under-estimate of the famine to say that two-thirds of the total population were affected more or less by it. On this basis the probable total number of deaths above the normal comes to well over $3\frac{1}{2}$ millions. *The estimate is subject to probable error inherent in all sample surveys.*

“The figures for infant mortality have been extremely high. The proportion of children below 5 years

of age has varied from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of the total deaths. A very sinister and significant feature of the mortality figures is that the death rate among adult men is much higher than among adult women.

"As a consequence of this differential death rate a large number of families have been deprived of their earners, who are generally men.

There is nothing strange and shocking in the high mortality figures ascertained, however inaccurately, by different institutions and from different quarters. Such towering figures have long attended the past famines in this country, but never was an attempt made to determine the exact number of the unfortunate souls who had died of starvation. And, the case of today is no exception.

As early as the month of September, 1897, the mortality rate in the Jabalpur district was 97, in Saugor 98, in Dauch 138, and in Sihora 225, whereas during the severe famine of 1837-38 the rate for the whole province did not exceed 95. (*Times*, London)

Within 67 years following the eventful 1770, in 1837-38 Northern India suffered from a severe famine, which was estimated to have caused at least 8,000,000 deaths. Relief works were undertaken by the State, the succour of the infirm and helpless being left to private charity for the most part. The expenditure amounted to 38 lakhs of rupees in 1838, but the results were unsatisfactory.

A few lines from Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal* will be, it is hoped, enough to make one realise the immensity of the disaster in 1770. He writes: "All through the stifling summer of 1770 the people went dying. In June the Resident at the Durbar (at Murshidabad) affirmed that the living were feeding on the dead. Day and night a torrent of famished and disease-stricken wretches poured into the great cities. The streets were blocked up with promiscuous heaps of the dying and the dead. Even the dogs and jackals, the public scavengers of the East, became unable to accomplish their revolting work; and the multitude of mangled and festering corpses at length threatened the existence of the citizens."

Lord Macaulay in his essay on Lord Clive, contained in the volume called *Historical Essays*, has also recorded some facts and opinions about the Famine of 1770: "The Hooghly every day rolled down thousands of corpses close to the porticoes and gardens of the British conquerors. The very streets of Calcutta were blocked up by the dying and the dead. The lean and feeble survivors had not energy enough to bear the bodies of their kindred to the funeral pile or to the holy river, or even to scare away the jackals and vultures, who fed on human remains in the face of day. The extent of the mortality was never ascertained; but it was popularly reckoned by millions. By November the trouble was careering towards an end; still throughout the three following years, the crop being although more than abundant, the effects of depopulation was severely felt. One-third of the province turned into a jungle inhabited by wild beasts."

Having been pressed by the members of the Parliament, the Secretary of State for India collected with great efforts the figures of death from starvation in the 1943-famine, which have been as follows: "Recorded deaths from all causes total 1,873,749. This total exceeds the average recorded mortality during the previous five years by 688,846."

In the Bengal Assembly on April 24, 1944, it was revealed that the Secretary of State had not in his possession the figures of the complete year of 1943. Again, at a London meeting held on April 19, 1944, Lord Leverhulme declared that 2,000,000 men, women and children died in Bengal alone from starvation. But people like Sir Alfred Watson found no reason whatsoever in tripling Mr. Amery's figures as Lord Leverhulme had done. Here Sir Alfred must be made aware of incompetence and inefficiency of the machinery and the manner of collection of figures of death in this country. In 1936-40 (five years) in Bengal the unregistered births and deaths were 43,182 and 17,376 i.e. total 60,918 (*Bengal Public Health Report*, from a sample survey). Again the statistics falling short of the actual may be argued from the difference between the intercensal increase of population and the increase accounted for by registered vital statistics. The percentage

that has been recorded by vital statistics is as follows : 1911-21—63·6 ; 1921-31—34·4 ; 1931-41—37·9. Thus, the normal failure of the vital statistics of Bengal to account for the change of population has been 62·1 (100-37·9) per cent. It has also been seen from the survey figures of the catastrophic Influenza Epidemic of 1918-19 that the under-registration during that abnormal period was 26 per cent or 1·4 times the normal. So, there will be no wrong whatsoever to assume that the magnitude of the failure to record famine deaths has been twice the normal.

A Bengal Government *Press Note* (*Bengal Weekly*, March 13, 1944) states that the average number of deaths per year during five years preceeding famine was 11,84,903. In 1943 this number was 18,73,749, the excess over the average being 6,88,846. Now eliminating the failure in accounting for the intercensal increase of population, the total death figure for 1943 should be $18,73,749 \times 100/37\cdot9 = 49,21,000$; and the average 31,26,000. Again, accounting for the failure to record deaths due to the abnormal times of famine, the total deaths might be $49,21,000 \times 2 = 98,42,000$. Hence the number of famine deaths during 1943 in Bengal must be between $49-31 = 18$ lakhs and $98-31 = 67$ lakhs.*

* After the calculations done by Mr. J. M. Datta, F.R.S.S. in the course of his articles in the Calcutta Municipal Gazette, April 22, 1944 and on.

APPENDIX—II.

Relief Measures in Famines.

THE first famine which seriously attracted the attention of the Government of India was the Orissa Famine of 1865-67. The then Governor, Sir John Lawrence, at first blindly relied on the results of private enterprise in importing of rice into the province; when he introduced Governmental control on food movements, it was too late. When relief was most urgently sought for by Orissa in 1865-66, it was very much inadequate; in 1867-68 extravagant expenditure was incurred on relief account, but its necessity was long past. The failure to meet the emergency in Orissa stimulated the Government of Sir John Lawrence to increased exertion in the construction of public works of various kinds in other provinces. The Governor-General established the sound financial principle that reproductive public works, that is to say, those which earn the interest on their cost, should be paid for by loan.

The proclamation of Her Majesty's assumption of the new dignity was made in an Imperial Assemblage at Delhi on January 1, 1877. The rejoicing of the solemn assembly were marred by the development of an exceptionally severe famine due to the failure of the rains of 1876 in Mysore, the Deccan and large areas of the Madras and Bombay Presidencies.

It was the South Indian Famine of 1876-78 that led to the appointment of the First Famine Commission. Its most important recommendations related to drawing up of Famine Codes embodying the main principles of famine relief to be followed in different provinces. However broad might have been the scope of the Codes, they could not bring about permanent effects on recurrence of famine in this country. What best they could do, they might temporarily check the rising mortality from starvation, but even for that these Codes have to be applied at the outset of the disaster. In the Bombay Presidency the business was so well managed that the cost was about four millions sterling against ten millions spent in Madras with less effect in the saving of human lives.

The Madras administration erred by strangling private trade from the first, and attempting the impossible task of providing all supplies through Government agency. Lord Lytton, the Viceroy, who had made an extensive tour in the famine-stricken districts, insisted on applying the principles of Mr. Turgot, which had been successfully applied on a small scale by Mr. Sleeman to the Sagar and Narbada territories in 1833. The Madras authorities, overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster, failed completely in organization. The Viceroy found that the whole action of the Calcutta grain-trade was on the point of being paralyzed by the conduct of the Madras Government; that mortality in Madras was terrible, and 'not a little attributable to the defective management and unsound principles of the local government'; that the population on the relief works was a 'mere mob'; that there was no organized system of village relief; that the relief camps in and around Madras were 'simply huge popular picnics'; and that the whole system was 'rotten to the core'. The drastic reforms introduced checked the abuses, but nothing could prevent an exceptionally heavy mortality. Large regions were bare of food of any kind. The injudicious early interference with private trade no doubt had much to do with the failure of supplies. Lord Lytton explained the sound principles of famine relief in an elaborate address to the Legislative Council in December, 1877, and obtained sanction to the appointment in the following year of the first Famine Commission, which submitted its report in 1890. The Viceroy, who desired to spend freely on railways and irrigation works as preventives of famine, was checked by orders from England restricting expenditure within narrow limits.

Messrs. Gibbs and Digby give the following policy for dealing with famine as they experienced the effect during the Southern Indian Famine campaign in 1876-78.

The Public Works Department should be prepared with useful schemes for irrigation, railroads, or roads, which might be carried out in an emergency.

A Famine Act should be prepared and passed under which magistrates should be permitted to send sick and starving men to relief houses, and healthy labourers, unable to support themselves to relief works, and keep them there.

The entire charge of famine work and famine relief should be centred in the Public Works Department.

It should be remembered that in a famine the sooner relief works are organized and commenced, the sooner is the check to weakness and starvation set up; and such works must be of a useful character, for should the severity of the famine cease, they can be stopped at any time, with the certainty that what has been done will afterwards prove of value, and the expenditure incurred will not be money thrown away.

Lastly, as Sir Richard Temple said, a fresh impetus must be directed towards material improvement of the country which is the best safeguard against famine in future.

The province of Mysore, situated between the distressed districts of Bombay Presidency on the one hand, and bordered by the most severely afflicted portions of Madras on the other, for a long time attracted but little attention. Famine had begun in Mysore in October, 1875,

The Viceroy's visit to Southern India, successful as it was in all its phases, was in nothing more strikingly justified than in the appointments which were made in Mysore. One of the first acts of importance which the Famine Commissioner undertook was the preparation of a famine code, containing detailed instructions for the administration of relief of all kinds. It was based on orders issued by the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, at Bangalore on September 8, 1877.

The instructions in the famine code are briefly summarized herein below :—

The backbone of the famine policy is the employment of all suitable applicants for relief on large works of permanent utility, superintended by professional officers of the Public Works Department. It is the duty of the Civil Officer to decide who are suitable applicants : (1) the *distance test* : which shows that he is willing to labour at a distance from his home, not returning there at night, but being huddled on the work ; (2) the *wage test*—that he receives a wage calculated to provide a bare subsistence for himself, but not enough to support any non-working member of the family ;

(3) the *task-work test*—that he performs a daily task proportioned to his strength. It is important to remember that while it is desirable to secure the best return in work for the expenditure incurred, the main object of opening and carrying out relief work is not for the sake of the work but for the sake of the labourers employed on the work.

On every large public work there will, if possible, be placed a Civil Officer to cooperate with and assist the Public Works Officer and a Medical Officer to take charge of the sick and those requiring special treatment. There will also be three classes of labourers; *Class I*—the moderately able-bodied; *Class II*—those who are weakly; *Class III*—those who are too much emaciated to do any but a very light task. Civil relief works may be employed in three ways: (1) as a safety valve for labour when there are more applicants than the P.W.D. can receive; (2) as a training school for P.W.D. work; (3) to give employment to the old and the decrepit.

The Relief Camps are not to be used, as is generally done, as dining places where people come for a meal or two a day and go away. Every person who receives relief at a Relief Camp must submit to two conditions:—(1) Residence in the camp; (2) Work.

COST OF BENGAL FAMINE, 1943

Rs. 11½ Crores

The 1943 famine has so far cost the Government of Bengal not less than Rs. 11,50,00,000 according to figures released by Government from time to time.

Out of this Rs. 5 crores has been spent on measures, such as the distribution of gratuitous relief, cloths and garments, and establishment of free kitchens. More than Rs. 2 crores has been distributed as loans to distressed people, while the much needed medical relief has cost Rs. 50,00,000. The loss incurred by Government by selling food-grains at cheap rates amounts to over Rs. 4 crores.

The total provisions in the 1944-45 Budget on account of Famine Relief in 1943-44 and 1944-45 have been Rs. 5 crores 65 lakhs, and Rs 2 crores 63 lakhs.

Small and emaciated children ; nursing mothers, who, either themselves or their babies, are suffering from mal-nutrition ; young and middle-aged adults of both sexes, who have been temporarily brought down by starvation ; women advanced in pregnancy ; convalescents out of the hospitals—these form the chief classes of special cases.

The object of a system of frequently repeated house to house visitation by the village officers in each village is to make sure that the measures taken by the Government for relief of the famine-stricken are effectual. In village inspection the first duty of the village officers will be, to ascertain and register the distressed poor of their respective villages. Every village officer should be warned that he will be held strictly responsible for persons in severe distress. There must be a list of those poor persons who are able to leave the village, but who have not done so. These people must be sent by the Circle Officer or Inspector either to relief work or to a Relief Camp. The death of any person must be reported by the Circle Inspector to the Special Relief Officer, who will enter the number in his weekly report.

Following the recommendations of the Famine Commission in 1876-78 much improvement was introduced into the working of the feeding kitchens in Bangalore. The voluntary committees were disbanded, and all relief kitchens were placed under official control. The Chief Commissioner confidently hoped that every member of the municipal committee would be willing to carry out house-to-house inspection. The Government grain dole must be strictly confined to those who were destitute, old, infirm and unable to labour, and who had no able relatives to support them.

At first the Viceroy had been disinclined to sanction large schemes of remunerative public works. Experience in Bengal famine of 1873-4 had shown that great projects might be commenced, much money expended upon them but the projects themselves could not be completed. The Madras authorities by the end of October, 1876, asked for relief works an amount of Rs. 377,770, adding that it was impossible to avoid expense or to provide necessary relief from provincial or local funds. The sanction was not

granted. In fourteen districts, covering an area of 80,000 sq. miles, distress was felt. In December district officers were ordered to open relief works as people came. The rates of wages were to be fixed locally according to the market prices of grain : $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of grain per man ; 1 lb of grain per woman ; $\frac{3}{4}$ lb of grain per boy.

In the large towns melancholy specimens of emaciated beings were seen, but the climax was reached in the city of Madras.

People died of starvation in the streets of Madras, and such occurrence had from its frequency ceased to alarm. Owing to deaths of cultivators for many years to come the revenue from the land must be very short. The problem of feeding the people in the district, of providing sustenance for many millions, was felt to be almost insoluble. Lord George Hamilton said in the House of Commons that the cost of the famine in Bombay and Madras would be £3 300,000. The area of famine was increasing every day. Formerly, including Mysore, it embraced a population of 20,000,000 but in August, 1877 the number was 25,000,000. And the deaths in August recorded a figure as big as 157,558.

Owing to difficulties, it had been a fairly long delay before the Relief Committees were able to distribute money to the destitute ryots for seed-grain and purchase of bullocks. Meanwhile in a manner not easy to describe, branches of trees were drawn across the soil as a substitute for ploughing ; men, instead of cattle, were yoked to the ploughs. At a much later period than usual the fields were prepared and sown. Much of the seed was bad, having been kept for eighteen months.

The same famine that blasted Madras was also responsible for great distress in Bombay and Mysore. The area over which the distress raged was 34,183 square miles and the population affected was 5,000,000. Up to January, 1877, the numbers were too great for a thorough supervision by the existing establishments, wages were liberal, and the works generally were too attractive. After January the proper remedies were applied by strengthening establishments reducing wages and enforcing work. In June the famine was at its height. When the monsoon broke, the

demand for Government assistance grew immediately less.

Government relief began as soon as the season failed, but pressure of high prices had already commenced. From the beginning to the end of the scarcity the activity of private trade in grain was extra-ordinary. It was at no time necessary for Government to import grain, or to organise any transport for private grain, or to reduce the fares on the railways in favour of grain destined to the distressed districts. All that was necessary was to give grain preference over other goods.

Those who received relief mainly belonged to the class of field labourers, of rude artisans, and of village menials. The relief work undertaken by Government consisted mainly of projects of irrigation and trunk roads. "The gratuitous relief", writes Sir Richard Temple, "was never administered at home to any save those who from sickness or infirmity were unable to move. All recipients of this relief had to go—some to relief centres to get a daily allowance of food, while the worse cases to relief camps, where they were accommodated with lodging as well as board."

The charitable organizations in the city of Bombay were conspicuous, Europeans and natives co-operating with cordial emulation. Though the city was not situated within the area of famine, still many of its quarters were crowded with hunger-stricken people often from distant places. The estimate of expenditure on direct relief made by the Government of Bombay during the spring of 1877 amounted to 116 lakhs. When the rains of the summer began to prove very unseasonable a further revised estimate of expenditure was made amounting to 120 lakhs.

In 1877-78 Lord Lytton and Sir John Strachey at Delhi declared their policy with regard to the distressed in these words, "We say that human life shall be saved at any cost, and at any effort; no man, woman, or child shall die of starvation. Distress they must often suffer; we cannot save them from that. We wish we could do more, but we must be content with saving life and preventing extreme suffering." And, by way of enforcing this admirable utterance the man, who penned it, in one district alone, *i.e.* Gurgaon, actually caused, by their merciless

collections, 120,000 people to 'disappear'; 150,000 cattle to die; and 2 millions of rupees of debt to be incurred.

The Revenue Department, which conducted the relief operations, had to make a call on the Public Works Department, and the latter must at once comply with the call. In complying with such a call the Public Works Department, which had earned the unenviable reputation of being styled the Public Waste Department, failed.

In this connection it will be interesting to note the memorandum that was circulated to the Parliament and the Press by the British Committee of the Indian National Congress in June, 1884. This memorandum was entitled '*The Poor Man's Lamb*'. It reads as follows:—

"In 1877-78 occurred the Great Madras and Bombay Famine, which, according to the official estimate, caused the deaths of 5½ millions of people. In order to make permanent provision against such recurring disasters, Lord Lytton's Government resolved in 1878 to impose certain new taxes upon the whole of India, and fresh taxation at such a time was looked upon with more than usual disfavour. The memorandum quoted some of the pledges given to India by Sir John Strachey, Finance Minister, Government of India and the then Viceroy Lord Lytton. Then it went on to show what had been done, in fulfilment of those pledges. It presented a table showing receipts from taxes and the expenditure on Account of Famine Relief and Insurance, from 1878-79, to 1892-93,

Year	Receipts from Assessed taxes Rs.	Total Expenditure on Famine Relief and Insurance Rs.
1878-79	900,920	313,547
1879-80	785,318	104,059
1880-81	558,720	34,840
1881-82	536,829	1,567,886
1882-83	517,811	1,495,972
1883-84	526,087	1,522,813
1884-85	511,828	1,548,357
1885-86	503,034	1,529,271

Year	Receipts from Assessed taxes Rs.	Total Expenditure on Famine Relief and Insurance Rs.
1886-87	1,354,735	460,832
1887-88	1,431,436	376,607
1888-89	1,520,940	508,518
1889-90	1,595,274	1,062,009
1890-91	1,617,396	1,082,351
1891-92	1,652,823	1,500,000
1892-93	1,686,141	1,500,000

Then, the memorandum gave in figures the difference between the promises and the performances side by side made by the Government of India in respect of Famine Relief and Insurance :

Promise of £1,500,000 a year Rs. 24,000,000

Expenditure on Famine Insurance

Rs. 16,000,000

Difference Rs. 8,000,000 or 33 per cent.

Even this meagre performance would be less by nearly Rs. 3,000,000 if the amount spent under Railway Revenue Account had been taken into account. Sir John Strachey had shown that during the twelve years preceeding 1878, the famine expenditure by the Government of India had been nearly £17,000,000 made up approximately as follows.:

Cost of Orissa Famine (1866)	£1,700,000
Cost of Bengal Famine (1874)	£6,750,000
Cost of South Indian Famine (1876-7)	£9,250,000

£17,000,000

The memorandum then looked at the matter in the light of the then history. "In the sixteen years since the taxes were imposed and the attendant pledges recorded, the Government of India can only claim on the most favourable interpretation of their own accounts, to have fully redeemed those pledges in eight financial years. During the first three years there seems to have been no special action taken to correspond with the additional taxes levied. In the year 1881-82, under Lord Ripon and

Major Baring, the Government of India fulfilled their pledges, and continued to do so until 1885-86. In that year came the annexation of upper Burma. This urgent administrative improvement proved too strong a temptation, and the 'sacred Trust' of famine insurance was neglected during the five years to the extent of Rs. 4,000,000 spent in completing the conquest of Upper Burma. In 1891 the Government of India once more accepted the responsibilities of its own pledges. This was more easy because since 1887 the average annual yield of the special taxes had been in excess of the amount which the Government were bound year by year to set aside for Famine Insurance. But this time the adherence to pledges has been shorter. Three years only, instead of five, have elapsed before the Government of India has again yielded to temptation. On this occasion the Famine Fund has been diverted to provide what is called Exchange Compensation Allowances, which simply mean an addition to the salaries of all non-domiciled European and Eurasian officials in India....In their Budget proposals the Calcutta officials, while showing a deficit of Rs. 3,500,000 have provided a sum of Rs. 1,000,000 for Exchange Compensation Allowances; and this sum has been obtained by a temporary suspension of the famine grant to this extent."

In his report on the great Indian Famine of 1876-8, Sir James Caird called the native village organization the sheet anchor of Indian state-craft, and the difficulty hitherto felt in famine administration in India had been the disorganization arising among multitudes of people who, when the last measure of grain was reached, broke away from their villages in despair and wandered in search of food or employment.

In 1864 Lord Lawrence had said, "The village communities, each of which is a little republic, are the most abiding of the Indian institutions." Remembering all these facts Sir James Caird laid down certain humane and practical maxims: (1) the most truly economical application of public relief is such early help as will give assurance of life. When the village is deserted, and the family is scattered depression of vitality comes on, there is no longer desire for life. (2) The first object is to maintain the people not

only in life but also in health and working condition ; and this can be better done by relieving them in the shelter of their own homes than by exacting task labour under hardships inevitable at great relief works.

In dealing with a famine the first steps count for the most. This lesson is impressed with some force by a consideration of what happened in the Southern Indian Famine of 1876-78, and particularly by the contrast between the action of the officials in Madras and the procedure of the Government of Hyderabad. "An adequate grasp of the situation in the autumn of 1876, followed by energetic measures," says Mr. (later Sir) William Digby, "would have saved to Southern India at least two millions out of the four millions who perished for want of food and from the diseases which privation produced." On the other hand, the secret of the success whereby the great famine was overcome in the Nizam's dominions was the promptitude with which the trouble was grappled with.

For the first time since the 31st March, 1886, the Government of India found it possible without imposing fresh taxation for the purpose to appropriate to Famine Relief and Insurance the full allotment of Rs. 1,500,000 from Revenue. This sum it was decided in accordance with the policy adopted in 1881 annually to be set aside for the actual relief of famine, for the construction of works calculated to protect the country from famine or for the reduction of the existing debt, or avoidance of debt otherwise about to be incurred, so as to form a set-off against borrowing that might be expected in a year when famine arose.

Mr. William Digby wrote from personal experience that a special fund, raised from additional taxation, had been founded in 1877-78 of Rs. 150,000,000 per annum for famine relief and prevention. In the first year only Rs. 13,388,000 were devoted to the purpose for which the fund was ear-marked. The balance of nearly Rs. 60,000,000 was spent in Afgan and North Western Frontier wars. In the five following years the receipts from the special taxation were properly used. In the three succeeding years less than half of the sum of Rs. 150,000,000 per annum was rightly disposed of. The whole sum during a portion of this period, was merged into the general revenue. To

STARVING MILLIONS

Year	Famine Relief	Construction of Protective of Irrigation Works			CONSTRUCTION OF PROTECTIVE RAILWAYS			Reduction or Avoidance of debt	Total
		Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Charged un- der Famine Relief and Insurance	Charged under Rail- way Revenue Account	Rs.		
1881-82	34,883	135,449	682,403	—	—	—	715,151	1,567,886	
1882-83	22,103	263,443	133,129	—	—	—	1,343,555	1,495,972	
1883-84	9,205	283,223	649,248	—	—	—	581,137	1,522,813	
1884-85	7,350	253,046	946,457	—	—	—	341,504	1,548,357	
1885-86	40,695	186,807	589,000	29,271	—	—	683,498	1,529,271	
1886-87	1,041	167,979	200,000	151,812	—	—	—	460,832	
1887-88	402	91,006	—	285,199	—	—	—	376,607	
1888-89	7,799	70,537	—	430,182	—	—	—	508,518	
1889-90	68,288	71,457	—	462,009	—	—	460,255	1,062,009	
Revised Estimate 1890-91	8,000	75,600	—	506,200	—	—	516,400	1,106,200	
Budget 1891-92	3,000	65,000	975,000	437,000	—	—	—	1,500,000	

the end of 1889-90 only Rs 2,882,280 had been spent in granting relief out of Rs 195,000,000 raised. Part of the balance went for protective railway and irrigation works—the remainder to general scheme. The fund was thus dealt with: total amount raised Rs 225,000,000; used for famine relief and famine prevention Rs. 130,208,370; misappropriated Rs 94,791,630 (*India*, October. 23, 1891).

The failure of the cold weather rains in the north of India in addition to reducing land revenue and increasing irrigation revenue compelled the Government of North West Provinces and Oudh in 1896-97 to provide a sum of 7 lakhs for famine relief. The Bengal Government also repeated the provision of half a lakh for famine relief by local bodies in the same year but no money would be required. No other Government had thought it necessary to make any provision for famine relief. In some places, particularly in the North West Provinces, the native States of Rajputna and Central India, the commencement of the railway works in contemplation was being hastened on with the object of providing work in districts which were threatened with scarcity. (SIR JOHN WESTLAND'S *Financial Statement for 1896-97 in the Legislative Council of the Governor General in India.*)

In criticizing Sir Westland's statement, especially with respect to the assurance for the Government's obligation regarding this Fund as self-imposed, Mr. Ananda Charlu said: "I do not see why it is called self-imposed obligation. It is, I believe, an obligation compulsorily thrust on the Government by the necessities and conditions inseparable from the administration of a country subject to repeated recurrences of famine almost as a matter of course."

The danger of famine, like the repositioning of the cotton duties or a trans-frontier campaign, dispelled for a moment the characteristic apathy of the British public towards India. Newspapers which on ninety-nine days out of every hundred complacently ignored the existence of British India, suddenly became alive to the opportunity; the Concise Cyclopaedia was taken from its shelf and the index to the report of the Famine Commission was hastily scanned. The advantage of these occasional researches could not be denied. But while nothing could be more

admirable than the sympathy which was invariably expressed, it must be admitted that the writers did not for the most part probe very far below the surface.

"To give an idea of the unscientific methods which are pursued by the Government in an attempt to cope with famine," writes Donald N. Reid in *India*, February, 1897, "inferior food-stuffs, such as millet and rice, will be sent by the grain-dealers thousands of miles on a railway journey to feed the starving people; while earth-nuts, which contain fully as much flesh-forming constituents in proportion to their weight as an egg, are exported out of India. I strongly advocate storage of grain in the congested districts, and in those districts where the rainfall is precarious; but the Famine Commission were steeped to the eyes in the doctrines of John Stuart Mill and other English political economists, and they pinned their faith on Free Trade and their net-work of railways."

Sir William Wedderburn declared in 1897 that India would feel grateful for the expressions of sympathy contained in the Queen's speech and for the assurances that the State would, in the appalling calamities, which menaced India, do all in its power to save life. But he added that the methods of relief which the Government of India had adopted sought to mitigate the symptoms, and not to remove the cause of the evil. That cause was the extreme poverty of the masses of the people. Expenditure upon famine relief was an excellent palliative which could not be applied too soon, nor administered too wisely. But

such expenditure did not mitigate the poverty of those who were taxed to provide for it. Indians died of starvation, not because they were perverse, but because they lacked food, and had no money or credit to obtain it. "India is poor, yet with her fertile soil, her unfailing sun, and her abundance of cheap and skilful labour, she might be rich beyond the dreams of avarice..."

